

ONE FOR THE AGES
How JORNNA NEWSOM
MADE A
Masterpiece
by ERIK DAVIS

FREE IN THE US Arthur FREE CANADA

ALAN
MOORE
ON 25
Years
OF
BIRN

Why the
AK-47
is the
Weapon of
Freedom

LET
THE KIDS
IN TOO
A History of
All-Ages,
Part II

the
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TV ON THE
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the death
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departments.



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By Jay Babcock, with artwork by Geoff McFetridge



I'm just sayin' DEPT.

LABOR DONATED BY...

Photographer **Eden Batki** is currently working on her first garden. "Okra and zucchini are the heartiest of plants," she says. edenbatki.com

Byron Coley would like to apologize to those artists who have not understood that his reviews are positive. As penance, he is working on free verse translations of the poetry of Émile Nelligan.

Erik Davis is an author, most recently, of *The Visionary State: A Journey through California's Spiritual Landscape*, with photographs by Michael Rauner. He is currently getting away with teaching a seminar about esoteric spirituality and modern art at UC Berkeley. www.techgnosis.com

Molly Frances is currently contemplating the merits of vegan eggnog. molly@crystalarchive.com

Justine Kurland agreed to shoot some would-be winter fashion pages based on three conditions: the featured clothing must be warm, handmade and free (or stolen).

Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's pornographic magnum opus, *Lost Girls*, was recently published by Top Shelf. Moore's latest writing, "Unearthing," can be found in *City of Disappearances*, an anthology of London-themed fact and fiction.

Thurston Moore is readying major rock insanity for the All Tomorrows Parties fest in the UK this December and will have a solo pop joint out on Ecstatic Peace in 2007. ecstaticpeace.com

David McCullough invented the shopping cart, the vibrating egg and the applause meter, but he will be most remembered for creating the seminal comic book character *Devil Chef*, which maintains legions of fans and horrified customers.

Jack Pollock's illustrations appear all over the place, including here. His 90-page magnum opus *Creature with the Soft-Serve Brain* will be out soon.

PShaw illustrated the cover and some full page comics to accompany a lot of questions he answered in the big newspaper-sized second issue of *Comics Comics*. www.pshaw.net

Dave Reeves loses it if you say "Henry Kissinjah" in his presence. His current bedtime reading is the Rand Corporation's *Considering the Effects of a Catastrophic Terrorist Attack* report.

Douglas Rushkoff is hard at work on *Testament*, a controversial new comic series for Vertigo that exposes the Bible as sex magick. www.rushkoff.com

After burning some frankincense, Italian illustrator **Iker Spazio** spiced up 'The New Herbalist' column (opposite) for this issue. www.ikerspazio.com

Multidisciplinary superstudio **Universal Use** art directed and designed this issue of *Arthur*. r.ahancock@gmail.com

Chris Ziegler was born in Tombstone, Arizona, and currently writes about music and *The Rockford Files* for the *Orange County Weekly* newspaper. christopher.ziegler@gmail.com

HAPPY HOLIBAZE

from **arthur**



Official *Arthur* Staff Holiday Photo



WRITING ON THE WALL

Arthur reader Brian Siewiorek recently saw this under a bridge in Pittsburgh, PA. Seen any good slogans/commentary/poetry on the streets lately? Then take a picture of it and send us the image at 300dpi, 100%. (If you don't know what that means, ask somebody who does.) Include the time/place of the photo. If your photo is chosen as *Arthur's "Billboard of the Month"* you'll get a complimentary one-year subscription to *Arthur*. send entries to editor@arthurmag.com

LETTERS.

▼▼▼▼▼

A FEW QUESTIONS REGARDING OUR POSSIBLE POST-CIVILIZATION FUTURE

Your interview with Derek Jensen ("Everything Must Go," July) was great, a thought provoking, and sobering portrait of civilization's ills. I found myself nodding while reading, 'Yes, of course, it's all wrong. Civilization is surely a failed experiment bound for a fiery crash.' But when looking for his vision of the future or a model from the past to revere, emulate and look forward to, I was left confused

As I understand current thinking about prehistoric life in the Americas, the hunter-gatherer populations here were continually increasing. The easiest way to relieve the resulting pressure put upon wild resources was for people to migrate into new territories. By the end of the Pleistocene however, all the habitable areas were occupied. With migration no longer feasible, population growth could only be dealt with by making gathering more efficient or by generating new food sources. Agriculture in this light was the natural result of humans dealing with scarcity of resources. With intensive agriculture came sedentary village life, increased cooperation, social stratification, specialization, and further technological advances. Food supplies increased and with them, populations too. Some of these communities gave rise to city-states and then full-blown civilizations with their art, monuments, pyramids, temples, and unfortunately their social inequity, warfare, deforestation and environmental degradation as well. (Look at the rise of the Maya, the Inca, the Hissatsinom/Anasazi, and the Mississippian Mound cultures to name a few).

Jensen's example of the Tolowa Indians of the Pacific Northwest as a sustainable culture will be a hard one to follow. The Northwest coast was one of the few regions in the Americas where abundant resources could support dense hunter-gatherer populations. In short, living there even up until European contact would have been like living in a Safeway, no need to 'invent' agriculture.

So where would that leave the rest of us not able to live in places like Tolowa Island as we march into a neo-archaic, primitive future (voluntarily or by force, i.e. a 'crash' or sabotage)? Jensen suggests we tear up parking lots to make agricultural fields, and ban together to protect ourselves and our property if need be against post-historic barbarians. In short Jensen seems to see us as territorial, agriculturally dependent villagers, hopefully living with an ecological enlightenment and the knowledge of what actions are and are not sustainable. Sounds good to me (I do hate my job). But, should our new eco-communities face starvation in their future will they resist doing something unsustainable and take one for green-team? Can we really expect them to? Or will they



resuscitate some part of our past, their now suppressed complex social and technological heritage—which paradoxically in its infancy seemed all too a part of the natural world—to help them survive, taking them steps closer towards civilization's rebirth? And if that's the case, what's the point of sabotage now if civilization's future rise is just as unavoidable as its present fall?

This conundrum aside, I personally take solace in this thought, abstract as it is: We humans esteem our capacity for rendering the earth inhospitable to life too much (I'm thinking long-term here). If the numerous extinctions, whether homegrown or of cosmic origin (asteroids, comets, supernova, etc.), over the course of Earth's history could not wipe out life—though one did kill 95% of all species on the planet—but only pave the way for the evolution of new, thriving, healthy ecosystems, we certainly can't. Poison yes, decimate certainly, but heal, regenerate, and evolve life on Earth will, with or without us. Perhaps long after the ding-dong of doom has sounded for humanity, Earth will nurture a more noble, but equally creative and self-aware creature, one who will be content with what we seem not to be: less.

Mark Hagen
via email

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

Aw, who the hell knows what motivates these loudmouthed, jackbootin', militant feminist pigs to go around shooting off at the mouth and stirring up trouble where there obviously isn't any (Letters, July and October). Your guess is as good as mine, but it is certainly annoying and it gives all of us girls out there a bad name. The only good point these thin-lipped shrews could have brought up was overlooked entirely, which is that some of the females in the American Apparel ads look all of 12 years old and they are posed very inappropriately if that's the case. Grow up, shut up, leave *Arthur* alone and get a life, bitches!!

Mallori Keeler
Greer, South Carolina

GOOD LOOKING OUT

I tried out the airgun with a shotgun shell duct-taped to the end ("Do the Math" by Dave Reeves, July) and it really doesn't work too well. What happens is the shell pretty much bursts and the shot scatters really wildly. I think it would work better if you uncrimped the shell first. For the record I used a Daisy .177 pellet gun and a Federal 12 Gauge shell with 7 1/2 shot.

Steve Stenslie
via email

Direct correspondence to editor@arthur.mag or Arthur West Coast Editorial Offices, 3408 Appleton Street, Los Angeles, CA 90039. All correspondence will be considered for publication unless otherwise marked, and may be edited for clarity.

THE NEW HERBALIST.



by
Molly
Frances

seasoned greetings

Deck the blahs with boughs of holly

■ The holiday commonly called Christmas brings with it general feelings of dread and depression, as well as the intrusion of traffic, crowds, family, chocolate-covered everythings, large rectangular boxes, turtlenecks, and relatives with weird hair giving even weirder gifts. Well friends, I'm here to tell you: It has nothing to do with that! Whichever winter holiday you choose to celebrate, from the Winter Solstice to Kwanzaa, I think we can do it better. We can make new rituals and traditions to define what these holidays are really supposed to reflect: faith, love, and rebirth.

■ The recently published *Pagan Christmas: The Plants, Spirits, and Rituals of Yuletide* by Christian Rätsch and Claudia Müller-Ebeling (Inner Traditions Press) is a fascinating resource to explore the origins and varieties of our holiday traditions. If you thought Christmas was a time to lay low the libido and close your heart for the season, this book begs you to reconsider. Resist the mood-killing family gatherings and neutering woolen sweaters and breathe in the seductive aroma of the ages. The very spices, plants, and incense that make us cringe when encountered in uncomfortable holiday environments have been used for hundreds of years to invoke fertility, love, and magic during the winter "feast of love." Nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, anise, saffron, ginger and vanilla were used in ancient Roman kitchens in baking and beverages, and many of these spices were considered to be aphrodisiacs. The authors instruct that "in medieval times festive meals were sprinkled to the thickness of a finger with spice powder, most often pepper, nutmeg, and cloves." So gather the freshest ingredients you can find and get to work on those gingerbread houses, cookies, and spiced ciders to rekindle ye olde ancient holiday magic.

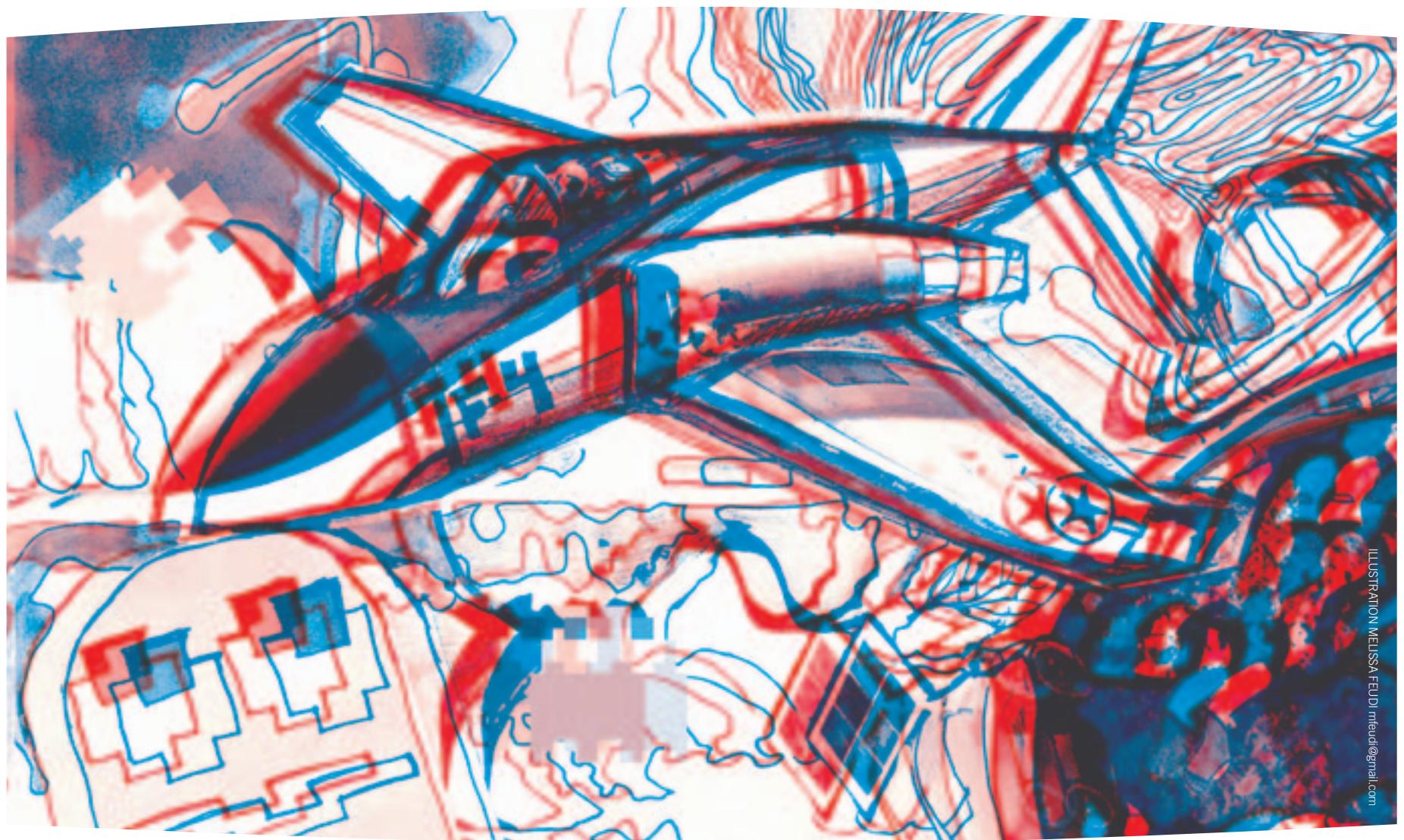
■ The greatest burden of the holiday season is of course the madness surrounding the selection of gifts, but it needn't be this way. Why not offer your friends a bowl of steamed kale greens garnished with olive oil, lemon juice and a festive toss of dried cranberries? Tell them you offer this bowl of nutrient-rich greens to open their heart chakras. They will be so overcome by your gesture of goodwill and caring that that marshmallow santa will be thrown to the ground in favor of real nourishment. Give your beloved a pomegranate, the symbol of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. This deeply romantic gift will sweep away all previous longing for that iPod or riding lawnmower they were expecting. Traditional and modest gifts of candles, plants, and incense are often the most potent and symbolically rich. Frankincense is described in the book as stimulating feelings of intense sensual joy and, due to its THC content, can create "pharmacological effects."

■ When we decorate and give gifts of green plants and flowers we are maintaining an ancient connection to faith and the hopeful message that winter will pass into spring. This is a time to celebrate the cycles of life, the light that we know will follow the dark winter days. *Pagan Christmas* reminds us that the Christmas tradition contains many holdovers of pagan rituals that were adopted by Christianity due to their undying presence in the popular mind. The disconnected presence of the living room tree can bounce back to a joyous significance when you consider that "pines are a symbol of immortality and resurrection. The idea that lucky children could find treasure hidden under them may come from the tree's long history as an object of pagan worship. Like fir and spruce, the perfume of the pine needles and pine resin was considered forest incense." The beauty of nature can thrive even in the dead of winter—or the suburban horror of Uncle Frank's den.

■ Let's not allow the manufactured and cynical distractions of the winter season to bully the magic from our thoughts. Creativity and passion can inspire us to cultivate new ideas about sharing time and gifts with the people we love most. The authors of *Pagan Christmas* point out that even normally bummed-out Nietzsche would perk up in anticipation of Christmas approaching. Instead of dredging your defeated soul to the mall, pay a visit to your local farmers market and browse the bounty of the fall harvest. Spread nature's sweetest gifts of tangerines or bags of pecans. Plant a tree in someone's name (www.americanforests.org/planttrees/) to celebrate the proliferation of nature. Break out of your Jello mold and create a spicy new holiday dish. And if you find yourself alone this winter, as all of us do one time or another, why not adopt a cat or dog? They will keep you warm, and if you feed them they will love you forever. Isn't that what it's all about?

M*F

ILLUSTRATION: KERI SPONZO / www.kerspazio.com



Applied.(Magic(k).beilqqA

The Center for Tactical Magic CALLING ALL GHOSTS

Ghosts are unwieldy subjects to contend with. It's as if their ephemeral nature predisposes them to be barely tangible topics of research. The vast majority of evidence used to support the existence of ghosts is subjective: first-hand reports and eyewitness accounts. Despite the fact that forensic science, cultural geography, physics, and parapsychology all suggest that any given area is inscribed with the residue of that area's history, the hard data on hauntings remains inconclusive.

To make matters hazier, the definitions of ghosts often swirl together with religious beliefs and philosophical assumptions. For example, if we define ghosts as being the spirits of the departed, we are stating clearly that we believe in life-after-death and some notion that separates body and spirit. Whether this notion is Cartesian Dualism, Egyptian Ka, Polynesian Mana, or the yin-world spirits of Taoism, the assertion is that the individual is not indivisible. At the very least we are forced to accept the idea that the self is multiplicitous.

This shouldn't be such a leap. At any given moment a

person can be characterized by many different activities that s/he engages in: mechanic, musician, anarchist, lover, gardener, cyclist, etc. A person doesn't think of him/herself as a mechanic when s/he's in the garden, although s/he also doesn't stop being a mechanic. We are many things to many people in many spheres of activity – simultaneously. But still we remain ourselves. On the most basic level, we live multiplicitous lives every day.

And when we go to sleep at night, it doesn't end there. Our dreams continue to embroil us in action-adventures that would surely leave us breathless and exhausted if it weren't for the simple fact that our bodies barely participate in all of the fun. If there is any sort of universal logic that can be applied as a subjective proof for the in-

substantiation of the self, it is the simple fact that we all dream, whether we remember it in the morning or not. To be clear, dreams don't prove that ghosts are real. Nor does it prove that ghosts are the spirits of dead people. Rather, the travels we undertake when our eyes are closed simply suggest that a meaningful disembodied existence can occur. Even if we dismiss dreams (and ghosts) as immaterial and inconsequential, anyone who has ever experienced a nightmare won't deny the fact that these visions can cause acute physical and psychological sensations in our waking lives.

But what are ghosts exactly? The incorporeal dead hanging out amongst the living? Reflected light? Psychosis? Atmospheric anomalies? Holographic messages

the problem with ghosts is not that they won't shut up, but rather that it took death to get them to speak up in the first place.

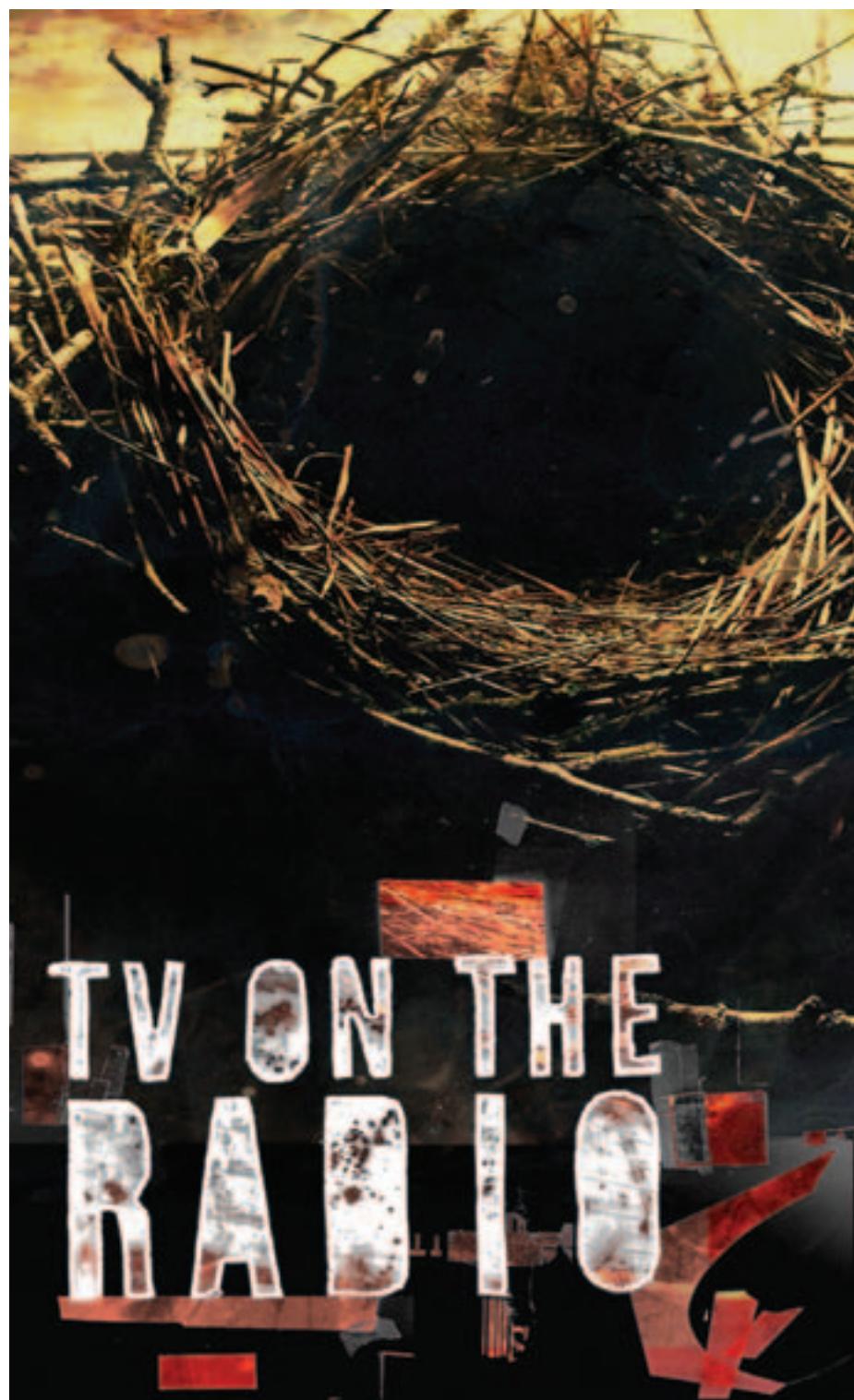
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from the future? Alien lifeforms? Osama's latest WMD (Weapon of Mental Distortion)? Whatever they are, ghosts, like magic(k), pop up, in one form or another, in nearly every culture on the planet, and have been described in legends, myths, and stories throughout history. A popular Chinese attitude towards ghosts is voiced in the age-old expression, "If you believe it, there will be, but if you don't, there will not." According to legend, the saying was penned by a scholar named Zhu Xi (Song dynasty, 960-1279). Now Zhu Xi was such a strict non-believer that he decided to write an essay about the non-existence of ghosts. But, lo and behold!—a ghost showed up to convince him otherwise. The ghost made such a lucid argument, that Zhu Xi was forced to reconsider his thesis. In fact, it's actually the ghost that is credited with authoring the aforementioned expression, and Zhu Xi merely wrote it down.

Whether we believe in ghosts as actual paranormal phenomena, or as manifestations of mass cultural imagination, we can agree on some fundamental characteristics of ghosts. For starters, it's significant to note that many such manifestations consistently take the form of people, or exhibit seemingly conscious behaviors. This could be similar to looking skyward and seeing faces in the clouds; however, there's one major exception. When we let our minds drift in the cumulo-nimbus we also tend to see things like bears in bathtubs, and inverted Lay-Z-Boys. And we don't hear ghastly tales of glowing gaseous forms resembling anything quite so banal, or cute and cartoony. Instead, we are most often presented with accounts of haunting encounters that evoke horror, sorrow, fear, anger, remorse, passion, and purpose. Ghosts emerge from the shadows; from dark corners; from forgotten and abandoned recesses. Regardless of whether or not these phantoms are psychological projections or external paranormal phenomena, it's clear that our collective response to these apparitions is apprehension, angst, and anxiety.

Generally speaking, there are two dominant types of ghost stories: lost love, and grave injustices. The "lost love" category encompasses all of those apparitions who wait endlessly for lovers to return, or visit their living loved ones for comfort, counsel, and last condolences. In the second category, the vast majority of ghost stories hover around a central theme of grave injustices yet to be rectified. Murder. Torture. Betrayal. The plight of this sort of phantom is one of paradox; it seeks to rest in peace, yet refuses to quit the struggle until things have been set right. While the crimes of the past still linger at the site of a haunting, the ghost's job is to make sure we, the living, don't ignore it. Their refusal to let injustices be forgotten manifests in a form of spiritual civil disobedience. From silent vigils to shrieks and moans to outright property destruction, these ghosts are paranormal protestors bearing witness to a world gone woefully awry. In their quest for peace, the phantoms that haunt us defy the laws of the material world in acts of otherworldly anarchism. Offering spiritual resistance to the complicit affairs of everyday life, these insurgent souls have little regard for the rules and boundaries that restrict the world of the living.

They defy even gravity itself. Moving through gates and walls, no barrier restricts their attempts to resolve the inequities that torment them—and consequently us. After all, it is the apathy of the living that drives them to disturb the peace, because they cannot rest until the

Form your own ghost mob and venture out to haunt sites of known social injustices. Banks, police stations, recruitment centers, and chain stores are but a few potential targets.

conflict is, once-and-for-all, addressed and resolved. There is no moving on. Not until unsavory events are properly put to rest.

It's this kind of dissenting spirit that needs to be channeled today. Even Senator Specter (R-PA), whose position on most policies is rather ghoulish, could not sit idly by when faced with the recent legislation surrounding Guantanamo Bay detainees. Like all hauntings, the degree of uncanniness is quite remarkable. It's only too fitting that the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee be named Specter. And perhaps even more appropriate that he should take issue with the United States' recent dissolution of *habeas corpus* (meaning quite literally "[You should] have the body"). Dating back as far as 1305, and included in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, *habeas corpus* is one of the oldest and most celebrated guarantees of personal liberty. It grants individuals the right to question their detainment and challenge the government on the legality of their imprisonment. By killing *habeas corpus*, the clock on civil liberties is set back more than seven centuries to a time when judicial courts were simply a king and his dungeons. No wonder Mr. Specter is voicing his disapproval.

The haunting of society by the ghosts of our collective past resonates within a present that continues to manifest grave injustices. Generation after generation, the abuse of power materializes in a reoccurring nightmare, claiming countless victims—collateral damage in a battle to maintain hegemony. Doomed to repeat the tragedies of the ages, these lost souls insinuate their desires and anxieties into the world of the living. Each step of the way, these energies inform our thoughts, our dreams, our actions—indeed, every aspect of our existence. Ghosts are an unsettling reminder that the crimes of the past have not yet been resolved. Refusing to quietly fade from consciousness, they demand that their howls be heeded. The residues of injustice permeate the physical, psychological, and parapsychological landscape, inscribing the present with desperate warnings and demands for reconciliation.

Perhaps it's time for the living to start paying attention to the stirring in the shadows. These aberrations in space, time, and freedom remain inscribed in mind, spirit, and social body, awaiting their release through the discovery and recovery of our own self-determining forces. Can the righteous spirits of the past truly join forces with the living to achieve peace and justice? If you believe it, there will be, but if you don't, there will not. **④**

exercises

Through methods of divination, channelling, investigation, experimentation, and active engagement, we can invoke those that seem most experienced in dealing with past inequities—ghosts. Here are a few experiments in magic(k) to get you started. As always, please let us know how it goes by emailing to: goodluck@tacticalmagic.org

1. Summoning ancestral spirits for guidance and inspiration is an age-old practice re-popularized in the '70s through Milton Bradley's mass production of the *Ouija* board. But you don't need to jump on eBay to get a piece of the action. Make your own walkie-talkie to the spirit world by covering any smooth surface with the letters of the alphabet, numbers 0-10, and the words, "yes," "no," "unclear" and "goodbye." Use another object that glides easily over the surface as your planchette, or pointer. A shot glass, serving spoon, or cell phone will work. A generic board will likely attract a general audience. For the best results, craft your set-up with a righteous spirit in mind using items and symbols that the spirit might find appealing. If, for example, you wanted the counsel of Nathan Hale, draw the board on a copy of the Patriot Act. For Harriet Tubman, try replacing the planchette with a broken handcuff. Grab a few friends, dim the lights, and place your fingertips lightly on the planchette. Then, invite the spirits, and begin your supernatural conspiring.

2. The problem with ghosts is not that they won't shut up, but rather that it took death to get them to speak up in the first place. Is it fear of death that keeps us from voicing our dissatisfaction with the world of the living? Or fear of life? Fortunately, there's no need to wait for that last breath to start haunting places. Form your own ghost mob and venture out to haunt sites of known social injustices. Banks, police stations, recruitment centers, and chain stores are but a few potential targets. From large-scale occupations by friends in Halloween gore to quiet insertions of tape recorded whispers and groans, a ghost mob can embody suppressed fears and desires whilst banishing the specters of social control.

3. Encounters with ghosts are said to increase during times of social crises and the post-trauma periods immediately following. Most notably, research suggests that more people see ghosts (or at least report them) in wartime and during post-war transitions. If this assessment is accurate, we should expect a barrage of ghost sightings related to Katrina, Afghanistan and Iraq. We are sincerely interested in studying this trend. If you have had paranormal experiences that you feel are related to social crises, please let us know by emailing us at: socialhauntings@tacticalmagic.org



Douglas Rushkoff THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE REALITY TUNNEL

By approaching the seeming interconnectedness of everything with a grain of salt and two grains of humor, Robert Anton Wilson has helped to demonstrate the value of seeing one's own reality tunnel for what it is: a limited take on a much greater whole

Illustration by Jack Pollock

This has been a very bizarre couple of weeks for me. I changed literary agents, did a bookstore discussion/debate with former Arthur columnist Daniel Pinchbeck, learned of Robert Anton Wilson's dire end-of-life financial predicament, and then left my wife and 21-month-old daughter to fly to Germany (where I am right now, stuck in an airport thanks to a canceled flight) to give a talk to a big magazine conglomerate about what makes their publications relevant in a mediaspace fast migrating online.

And I've found myself alternatively inspired and unnerved, about each and every one of these events. I feel their connection on an emotional level—as if the microcosm in which I'm participating reflects a greater theme. Like an archipelago, this seemingly disconnected string of islands is all connected beneath the surface. And that connection is about how we make value—for ourselves and one another.

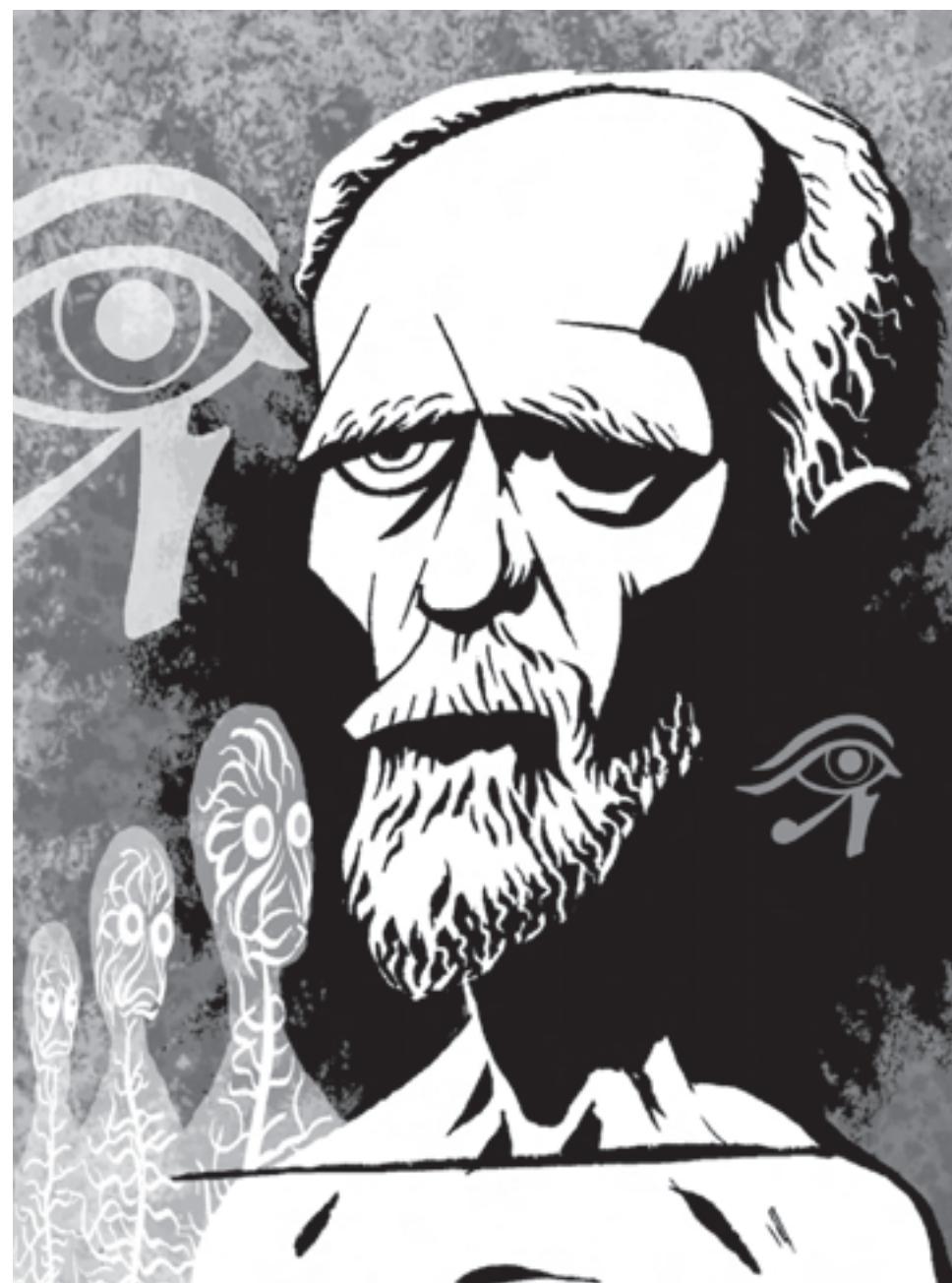
Take the Pinchbeck event. Now it's no secret to Arthur readers that he and I come from different ends of the spiritual spectrum. When he was writing columns in these pages about channeling the wisdom of Quetzalcoatl, I was warning the same readers not to take any prophecy too seriously—and certainly not literally. Then, I ran into Daniel in a coffeeshop just a week after a particularly critical screed on him and the “psychedelic elite” came out in *Rolling Stone*—an article in which I was quoted on the value of communities over heroes.

We concluded that a face-to-face discussion was in order, and figured we might as well do it in public. So Daniel asked a bookstore where he was scheduled to speak if we could turn it into a two-man show. Almost as soon as the discussion was announced, email started coming in, asking how I was going to “take him on” or “take him out”—the assumption being that we'd have a take-no-prisoners debate. And while I'm certain we've pissed each other off over the years, I thought the point of mixing it up a bit would be to learn something from one another. Find common ground. Meanwhile, we'd end up bringing together a rather unlikely audience of media students, recent Burning Man returnees, psychedelics enthusiasts and comics readers. In business terms, we were “creating value” for one another and our separate readerships by introducing them to each other.

I'll admit, the event both inspired and disturbed me. Sure, the assembled crowd was varied and eager. But the conversation itself was too competitive, no matter how I intended otherwise. All I meant to show was that we each have our own reality tunnels—and that no matter how spectacularly “real” something may appear, especially on super-strong shamanic entheogens, it's just one metaphor for whatever it is that might really be going on. None of us knows what happens when we die, whether there's anything or anyone else “out there,” or whether the connections we seem to perceive all around us are conspiring or coincidental.

Daniel tended to dismiss my points he disagreed with as “thoughts,” to which I finally snapped that “everything we're saying is just thoughts, buddy.” I leave it to you to choose who of us is more Zen, but my lasting impression of the conversation was that we didn't quite transcend the zero-sum game as I had imagined we would. It was still just two white guys with microphones, competing for mindshare and the marketshare that goes along with it. Had I been used simply to get more people to show up at his book signing? Was I seeing in him the qualities I dislike in myself? Why should such misgivings even arise?

Then came word from a truer pioneer of mind and cosmos than either of us, Robert Anton Wilson: his post-polio syndrome had gotten worse, and the attendant medical bills combined with some trouble with the IRS had tapped him out. He was three days away from not being able to make his rent.



Say what? Robert Anton Wilson, author of *Cosmic Trigger* and *Prometheus Rising*, the guy who put the number 23 on the map, and delightfully upgraded the minds of thousands if not millions, forever, could no longer support himself? For those who may be unfamiliar with his work, Wilson is the man who put the many insights of Sixties into perspective. By approaching the seeming interconnectedness of everything with a grain of salt and two grains of humor, he's helped to demonstrate the value of seeing one's own reality tunnel for what it is: a limited take on a much greater whole. Rather than getting lost in any particular tunnel (or, worse, pushing it on other people) the object of the game was to learn to move between them.

On learning of his predicament, I felt an anger welling up. I refused to be a member of a generation that could allow an author and philosopher of his caliber to die penniless in a state hospital, so I dashed out a blog post (<http://www.rushkoff.com/2006/10/robert-anton-wilson-needs-our-help.php>) alerting the “community,” along with Bob's Paypal address (olgacline@gmail.com). Thanks to a link from BoingBoing.net, we raised over \$68,000 dollars in just the first couple of days, along with a few hundred heartfelt testimonials in the comments section.

But there was a second thread in the comments section that disturbed me. “How do we know this is not a hoax?” some people were asking. Indeed, I wondered. How do I prove I'm not a scam artist of some kind, putting up my own Paypal address? This is the Internet, after all. Further down in the comments, someone had posted the response I might have been embarrassed to make for myself: “just look at Rushkoff's site and his work.”

And that's when the value of “reputation”—what business folks call “brand”—actually made sense to me as a good thing rather than just some ego trip. The fact that I've been writing books for 15 years and have been hosting an online community of one sort or another for nearly as long has earned me the trust required to communicate an urgent fact and

CONTINUED ON PG 46

*What is
the most
significant
contribution
you can
make
to this
world?*



Thank You Artists of the *Family Album*!

What's up with the Grass Roots Record Co.?

by Marc Snegg

Over the course of two weeks, twenty groups from or connected to Nevada City, California crowded into the Brighton Sound Studio to record their songs live and direct into the microphone. Inspired by releases from record companies like Sun, Motown, Elektra, and Studio One, Grass Roots Record Co.'s **Family Album** is filled with songs you will want to hear many times over. They are lasting, infectious melodies—honest music in a world where truth-telling is a great revolutionary act.

What these artists have to say exhibits the kind of urgency that makes music both timeless and timely. Whether it's the heavy-duty

Hella riff or intensity of **Made In**, the pop gems of **Golden Shoulders** and **Lee Bob Watson**, the acoustic beauties of **Alela Diane**, **Marie Sioux**, **Alina Estelle Hardin**, the **Moore Brothers**, or **Jessica Henry**, the classic melody of **Benjamin Oak Goodman**, or the modern hillbilly poetry of the **Reckon Family**; be it the unclassifiable rockers by **Them Hills** and **Casual Fog**, the innovative warmth of **RF** and **Neal Morgan**, or the dreamy reverbdrenched **Kings & Queens**; from the **SneggBand's** jazz-soaked slow-jam to the incendiary social truth in the words of **Biff Rose**, these are songs guaranteed to send a shiver down the spine.

The **Family Album** is unlike any compilation you've heard. This is not a collection of tunes culled from across time and place. This is an album. Though the songs are diverse in style and voice, you will hear an uncanny continuity from track to track and from artist to artist. Each group on the album performed their songs live, together in the room, direct to tape. You can feel the energy between the players—the familiarity of these folks who, for almost two decades now, have lived, created, and performed together.

And so, Grass Roots Record Co. is proud and honored to work with these artists to bring you their

songs. Expect many more records to come from the talent here. In my experience these are the real deal artists, singers, poets, and rockers, playing for the right reasons—inspiration, art, communication, and FUN. Further, Grass Roots Record Co. is a real record company, committed to facilitating the creation of many years of important, historic music.

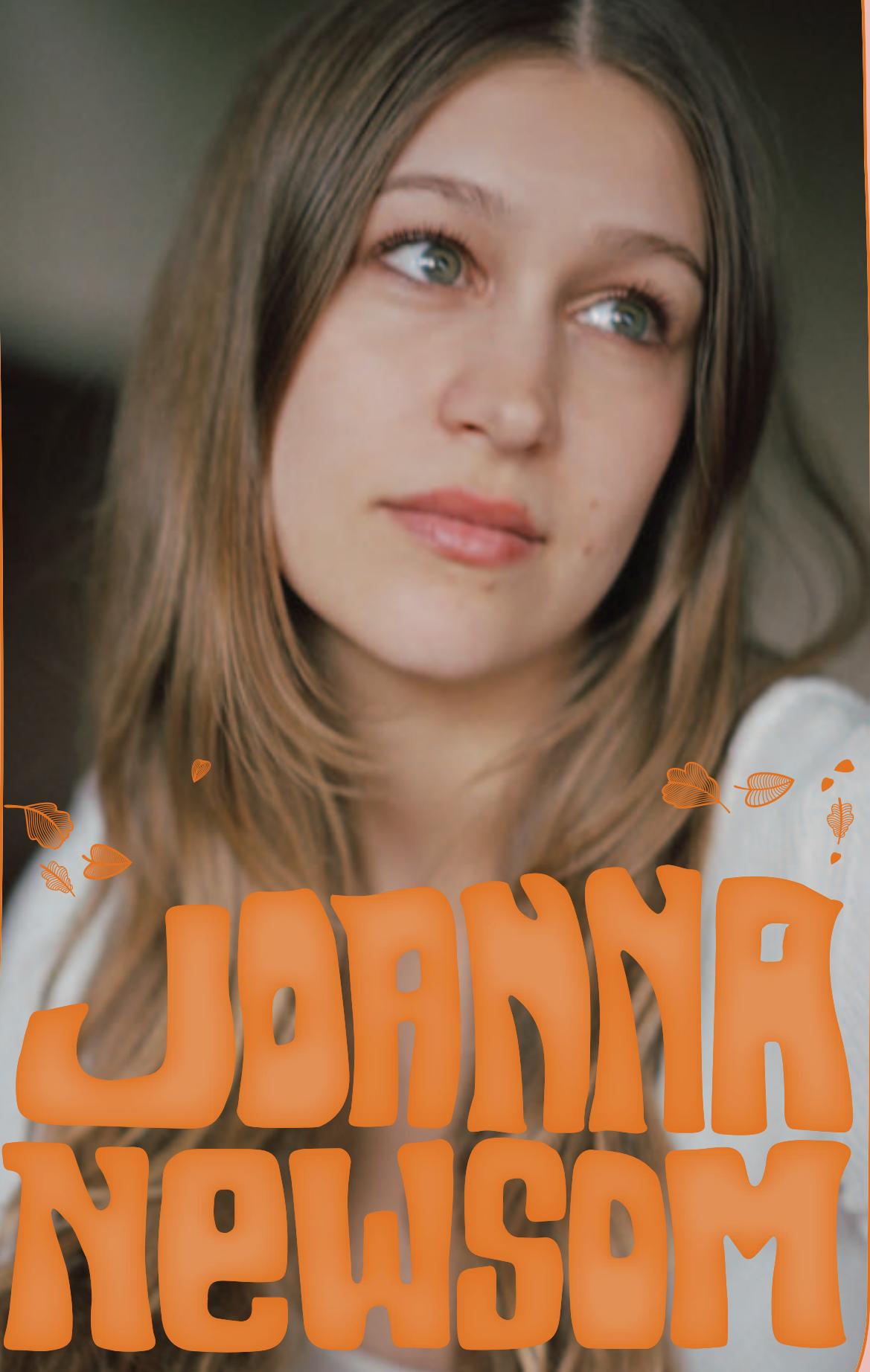
But don't take my word for it; the artists on the **Family Album** speak for themselves! Get your ears up in the music, and see the photos from the recording session on our website, www.GrassRootsRecordCo.com and at www.MySpace.com/GRRfamilyalbum.

GRASS ROOTS RECORD CO.

P.O. Box 1348 • Nevada City, CA 95959 • 530-601-2415 • GrassRootsRecordCo.com



ALWAYS COMING HOME



JOANNA NEWSOM

By Erik Davis • Photography by Eden Batki

12 **arthur:**

How California harper Joanna Newsom's masterpiece album *Ys* grew from a time of personal turmoil, ambitious collaboration — and eating hamburgers again

Last February in Los Angeles, Many folks present were already chest-deep in the cult of Joanna, a fandom that made 2004's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* a leftfield indie hit and that turned Newsom herself into the sort of music-maker that inspires devotion as well as pleasure. At the time I admired *Mender*, but was, as of yet, no acolyte. I dug a handful of songs, but like many listeners, I found the eccentricity of Newsom's voice sometimes rather grating. I also feared that the outsider waif thing was just an underground pose stitched together with lacy thrift-store duds and an iPod stuffed with mp3s of the Carter Family and Shirley Collins.

My bad. The performance I saw that sublime night was the real deal: a young artist stretching beyond her art towards something even more essential, simultaneously in command of her craft and caught in the headlights of her own onrushing brilliance. The song cycle she played was to *Mender* what, I dunno, *Astral Weeks* is to *Them*, or what *Smile* is to The Beach Boys today! She sang of meteorites and bears and ringing bells, of her and him and you, and she played not for us, it seemed, nor for herself exactly, but for the very presences her music conjured. Her songs were not performed so much as drawn from herself like a net dredged from the sea, heavy with kelp and flotsam and minnows that flashed before darting back into the deep. The musical ideas—shifting, resonant, rarely repeating—seemed to bubble up from an endless well. When she occasionally stumbled and lost her way, the material itself would pick her up again and carry her forward.

None of us standing there in that rapt crowd had ever heard music like this before. Newsom's wild-child ballads seemed loosed from some location heretofore unseen in the realms of popular song, a secret garden lodged between folk and art music, or an unnamed island lying somehow equidistant from Ireland, Senegal, and California's redwood coast. Music of such radiant singularity emerges a handful of times a generation, if we are lucky, and it seems churlish to pin the butterfly down. (Or is that a moth?) Certainly it was genius, but genius is such an easy word now, a thumbtack of muso claptrap that marks the person rather than the source that lies behind the person. And this music was all source—although it was she, and not the source, we heard, this charming lass with the awkward stage patter and the lacy thrift-store duds.

Sorry to keep the tankards of praise raised high, but the album *Ys* is also pretty dang nifty: an incandescent journey through desire and lament that is at once nakedly personal and deeply cryptic, like the cavernous meanderings of an alchemical dream. It's not just a great piece of work, but a Great Work: an intentional and prodigious and, dare I say, spiritual labor



from start to finish, from the inspiration through the cover art, from the orchestrations through the final, analog mixdown. Newsom gathered a stellar cast of characters around her, including Steve Albini, Jim O'Rourke, and Van Dyke Parks, the legendary Brian Wilson collaborator who scored marvelous and vivid arrangements for four of the five songs. But it is her own visionary ambition that makes this record the very opposite of a sophomore slump. A lesser artist would have simply ridden the quirky crest of *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, but Newsom glimpsed a golden ring glittering on the far horizon, and she stretched beyond herself with pluck and hooked it good.

HOMESTEAD The house that Joanna Newsom recently purchased is, well, rather Joanna Newsom. The building lies in the outskirts of Nevada City, an old mining town nestled in the western foothills of California's Sierra Nevada range. It has a small circular driveway, rose bushes, and a broken fountain with two cherubs smeared with mud up to their necks. The one-acre property is fringed by sycamores and pines, and two massive ivy-swaddled conifers loom over the patio out back, dripping gobs of sap onto a weathered table. The firethorn bushes that cloak the breakfast nook and the porch haven't been trimmed in a while, deranging the otherwise orderly air of a proper British cottage. Past their plump clusters of golden berries, you can glimpse her old, worn-out pedal harp, peeking through the window like a stage prop.

Newsom answers the door with a smile and invites me in. She is dressed in a knitted brown skirt, a low-cut sleeveless shirt, chocolate brown knee-high socks and moccasins. The wide leather belt tugged snug around her waist looks a lot like the belt she wears in her portrait for the cover of *Ys*. The bangs are gone, and she's cute as a vintage button.

"I'm sorry. I just moved in and I haven't really been here much." There is not much furniture beyond a couch and, alongside her harp, a gorgeous Craftsman wooden stool inlaid with turquoise. There is hand-written sheet music scattered on the floor and one large decoration waiting to be mounted on the wall, a nineteenth-century funereal display scavenged from a San Francisco thrift store. "It was there for years, and finally I had to have it." Having spent the last few weeks obsessively listening to *Ys*, I can see why, so crisply does the thing reflect some of her major themes and images: inside the large glass case, two stuffed doves face off over clusters of dried wheat, neatly arranged over a fat and faded ribbon printed with condolences.

We settle down on the table outside, and dig into the past. Newsom grew up around Nevada City, but she lived for years in the Bay Area, where she studied composition and creative writing at Mills before dropping out, writing some songs and recording them with her first boyfriend, the musician and producer Noah Georgeson. Even then, she kept returning to the nest on weekends, but feared the phenomenon an old Austin friend of mine referred to as the velvet rut. "It's a real easy place to get kind of stagnant in your head, to get overly comfortable and have the years pass by." Now that her career has taken off and she is constantly traveling, she decided to return to the place that, in her words, makes her feel happiest and most at home.

Newsom loves her property, but what she would really like is to live on a high hill above the south fork of the Yuba river, surrounded by forests and horses and the looming lordship of the distant Sierra peaks—which is just the sort of place she was lucky enough to actually inhabit growing up. Her folks,

both doctors and mildly hippyish in the manner of certain California professionals, moved up here from San Francisco in the early 1970s, to a hilltop property surrounded by vineyards and stables and dogs and chickens that wandered everywhere. At the time, the former Gold Rush hotspot was becoming a quiet center of freakdom, making it one of those rare places in America where a proximity to wild country did not mean having to live under the cowboy boot of rural conservatism. The Beat poet Gary Snyder bought land on the nearby San Juan Ridge, the minimalist composer and Pandit Pran Nath devotee Terry Riley settled down to raise a family, and spiritual communities like Ananda Village were popping up. Even one of the guys from Supertramp got a place, and built a guitar-shaped pool.

If you were standing on the back porch of the Newsom homestead, this is what you would see: "Looking out over the canyon that the Yuba river is in, you see the two sides of the canyon and then the Ridge, and behind that the higher foothills—the pass over Tahoe—and behind that the Sierra Buttes, these amazing huge mountains. We would eat outside, watching it all through dinner: insane hot pink clouds that come down and do what they do and then everything gets purplish and then the bats come out and get all drunk on bugs and bump into each other and it's insane and then the lights come on and the moon comes out and reflects against the snow on the Sierras." She pauses, recalling the scene. "It's really pretty," she purrs. "It's really nice to look at."

California's gold country is beautiful, but it is also haunted by history. Downtown Nevada City holds onto its past with a vengeance, with zoning laws creating the atmosphere of a pleasant Miner Forty-Niner theme park. But darker and more wayward tales make their claim as well. A network of underground tunnels once linked brothels to more reputable taverns, while the Maidu Indians who called the area their home not so very long ago are tragically conspicuous in their absence. A big chunk of the hill that Newsom grew up on is fenced-off, with a nearby sign marking it simply as "Indian Burial Ground." Newsom and her buddies never even snuck onto it. "Even when we were little there was a little bit of reverence," she says. "We just felt really bad." She also felt that the restive spirits and "bad juju" of the place might have caused the weird energy that seemed to descend on her childhood home in the mid-morning hours—"like there was this unbearably loud chatter but there was nothing." Though she heard and sensed plenty of spooky shit in her house, she never saw an actual apparition there—nothing like the uncanny woman in flouncy skirts and a weird button-up collar that she glimpsed one night while working after close in Café Mecca, a Nevada City java joint that had once been a brothel. "It could've been a crazy Nevada City lady," she admits. "But it is a bit of a mystery how she got through the locked door. I don't know. I'm sort of convinced I saw a ghost."

Such specters may be nothing more than figments in the mind, but even so, they are figments of something deep: the persistence of the past, and the layers of rich and sometimes traumatic memories that cling to buildings and rivers and burial grounds. Newsom's music is also full of figments, of old blues blurred anew. Her famous line from "Sadie"—"This is not my tune, but it's mine to use"—captures this twisted continuity of memory and transformation, of love and theft. Part of what makes Newsom sound "folk" is her palpable sense of such ties—not just to the foothills of the California high country, but to her family, her friends, and her harp, with its own traditions, classical and folk alike. And as her own music proves, this sense of roots does not mean theme-park conservatism or

a lack of innovation—especially, perhaps, when those roots are in a rootless place like California, a restless, visionary landscape that's always ready to crack.

HARPER One of the most transcendent musical experiences of my life unfolded years ago during an annual folk festival held in the small Estonian town of Viljandi. A parade of slick Euro-folk-pop acts occupied the larger stages, but my wife and I preferred the informal tents, which were packed with folks dancing



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GENIUS
Joanna Newsom, at home in Nevada City.

trad to teenage polka groups or locals playing perfectly rendered old-timey dobro tunes. As evening settled and the haze of beer fumes and burned sausage thickened, we slipped into a small whitewashed medieval church to hear the Ansambl Sistrum, an ensemble of four women who play the kannel, Estonia's lovely version of the lap harp.

The Estonians are a Finno-Ugric folk, and in the Kalevala, the Finnish folkloric epic patched together in the nineteenth century, the great magician Väinämöinen fashions the first kannel (or kantele, in Finnish) from the jaws and teeth of a monstrous pike. The birds and the bears and all the beasts of the field come to hear Väinämöinen play the instrument, which is later lost in battle and buried at the bottom of the sea. And it seemed to me, that night, that the master musician who led the ensemble must have fished the damn thing out, because the brocade of sound she and her angelic crew of ice-babes plucked from their elven kannels was absolutely spellbinding: ancestral, spiky, and cosmic, like Messiaen in Middle-Earth. I was gone. Then some idiot's cell phone went off and he gruffly took the call, right there in the church—an abrupt reminder, as if one were needed, that angels and elves do not exist in our annoyingly real world. But the spell had been real, too, or as real at least as the instruments that had briefly conjured it into being.



The instrument in question, of course, was also a kind of harp, an ancient instrument that is found in most musical cultures and is often associated with magic. Väinämöinen's kantele is only one of a number of enchanting harps from northern climes, including the Irish chief Dagda's ax, which, depending on the melody he played, could compel listeners to weep, giggle, or sleep. King David composed the holy psalms on a harp, while the ancient Greek culture hero Orpheus, source of the mystic Orphic mysteries and commander of the beasts, invented the harp-like lyre (one of these Greek lyres is embossed in the leather diary that forms the booklet cover for *Ys*). The cheesy Hollywood angels that unconsciously reverberate through our imaginations when we look or listen to harps are the cotton-candy dregs of this numinous legacy.

Though she is understandably ashamed to admit it now, Joanna Newsom was first drawn to play the harp because of the angels and fairies and other girly phantasmagoria that swirled around the instrument in her head. She was only five or so when she told her parents her desire, too young to really grapple with the instrument, but when she finally got her hands on a Celtic harp a few years later, her fascination had not abated. By high school, Newsom had switched to the more challenging and versatile pedal harp. The fantasies had fallen away, and a painstaking musical apprenticeship had begun. Though the expressive potential of the harp is in some ways hamstrung by the standard classical and Celtic repertoire, Newsom was lucky: her first teacher, Lisa Stein, taught her the basics of improvisation from the get-go. Soon the teenager was composing her own lush and melodic compositions along with practicing the usual etudes and cadenzas.

Newsom's playing was already inventive and technically strong when the teenager met an established harper from Berkeley named Diana Stork. The two were attending a ten-day music camp held annually in the Mendocino County redwood groves—a longhaired, down-home gathering of global folk fanatics that Newsom's mom started taking her to when she was nine. Newsom immediately distinguished herself from the other young harpers there. "You could sense she was on a real path with the harp," says Stork, who attributes Newsom's remarkable drive to inspiration rather than ambition. "She's not driven by other people, or by making it, or by professionalism. The harp is what drove her, her passion and love for her instrument."

What Stork taught Newsom was rhythm. In particular, she taught her some interlocking figures based on the kora, a stringed lute-like harp-thing made of calabash and cowhide that's used by the wandering West African bards known as griots. Like nearly all West African music—and like essentially no classical Western music—kora music is largely polymetric, which means that each hand is following a different meter, or rhythmic pattern. The basic pattern that Stork taught Newsom is two (or four) beats against three. Stork explained that, according to the African lore she had learned, the duple measure, thumping like a heartbeat, represents the earth, while the triple

time follows the breath and represents the heavens. By playing these beats against and through one another, a single performer can unite earth and sky. Said performer can also get pretty funky, because it's the overlapping and constantly shifting slippage between the different meters that gives West African music—not to mention James Brown—that special spine-wiggling groove.

Newsom fell hard for this polymetric plucking. She loved its physicality, and the sense of substance and danceability it brought to the harp's fragile, quietly resonating strings. She took pleasure in training her brain and hands to follow two different pulses at once, and in exploring more complex metric possibilities. Soon she began working versions of these interlocking figures into her compositions. "It was like an opportunity to do something—not new, because I didn't make it up—but to use it in a new way."

Newsom's kora "bastardizations" are used to great effect throughout *Ys*, especially in the consoling middle passage of "Sawdust & Diamonds" ("Why the long face?"), and in the shimmering high section that follows the duet with Bill Callahan towards the end of "Only Skin." Newsom points out that these shifting rhythms can disorient the mundane metronome in our minds, defamiliarizing our sense of where we are in a song. "That disorientation is really effective for creating something that you actually have to listen to," says the songwriter, who has no interest in *Ys* becoming background music. "When any element in the musical environment is tweaked in such a way that you don't feel like you know what's coming next, it can cause less of a passive listening experience across the board. I like the idea of not just plodding through songs with a regular beat and a regular chord progression. Maybe the lyrics are felt or received differently, as if the listener were in a sharper mental climate."

Newsom was keen to create this sharper mental climate because, while the lyrics on *Ys* can seem pretty opaque at times, they are anything but casual. On a personal level, the album is a highly focused and richly encoded reaction to a lot of heavy shit that went down in the young woman's life, a year of mortal-coil turmoil that spun itself, through a series of uncanny coincidences, into something like a single fatal story of loss and release. This back-story not only upped Newsom's ambitions for the lyrics, but also forced the epic length of the songs, most of which hover around ten minutes, with "Only Skin" reaching the absurd, Yes-worthy expanse of 16:53. "I needed to respond to certain things musically and lyrically," she explains. "And I knew that I couldn't fit any of that gracefully within a normal song length form. I thought it would be really vulgar actually, and not even worth trying."

Luckily, Newsom already had the chops. One of the reasons that she stopped studying music at Mills was her discovery that the long and melodic instrumental pieces she was writing were more akin to traditional songs than the more explicitly experimental or conceptual compositions that are encouraged in music departments. So she opted to follow the songs. Then, with the gems from *Mender* under her wide leather belt, she was able to stretch out again for *Ys*. "I luxuriated in those new parameters," she says. "It promoted a sort of ambition because, while I'm not making any definitive statement here, I imagine that I probably won't do another record of long songs again. So I really wanted to do well within that format. I really wanted to do right by my topic."

The emotional demands of Newsom's new material also made demands on her voice—certainly the most idiosyncratic aspect of her music, and the one most likely to compel certain listeners to want to throw her CDs out the window. Newsom is a bit touchy about the press reactions to her voice, and particularly the idea that she is affecting its simultaneously weathered and childlike eccentricity. When Newsom recorded her first EPs—which she has now "officially blacklisted"—she had barely been singing at all, and

Mender was recorded less than a year after that. "When I listen back to those first EPs, I'm like, well, that voice does sound fucking crazy. There is no way around it. But I know exactly what space I was in. I was so sure that I didn't know how to sing that I was just going balls out. I was like: I'm going to sing my heart out, as crazy as it sounds, and I'm not going to care because there's no hope of sounding anything like what people consider beautiful. I sure as hell wasn't affecting anything. I mean, the institution of singing is inherently an affectation!"

When Newsom wrote her harp compositions, she would often score passages she could not yet play, forcing herself to strengthen her technique in order to make the music she was hearing in her head. She took a similar tack to the vocals on *Ys*. "There are certain passages that I literally could not sing when I wrote them," she says. The song "Monkey & Bear"—which begins with a stack of overdubbed harmonies that sounds like the Andrew Sisters in Oz—was "basically unsingable." But relentless touring had already improved her voice, softening its sharpness and lowering her register, and with obsessive practice she brought her throat up to snuff.

Newsom's vocals on *Ys* are rich and mercurial—girlish and wizened, nurturing and needy, with Kate Bush highs and Billie Holiday lows and, yes, some trembling Björkish breaths. She seems at once to command and suffer through the tangled and shifting emotions of the songs, the rougher edges of her voice refined without losing any of their spunk. The performance reminds me of something Newsom said in 2004, when she told Arthur why Texas Gladden's rendition of "Three Babes" had allowed her to sing. "It wasn't just that she was from Appalachia, and that she sang in that tradition," Newsom said. "It was that she was her. Her voice, in and of itself, is magical. And rare." Such singularity is not easy—it must simultaneously be stumbled upon and cultivated, not disciplined so much as embraced and befriended. "My voice is not necessarily more trained," Newsom admits. "It's just more familiar. I inhabit it more. It's not like this thing I'm holding out from myself. It's a part of me."

SONGS The south fork of the Yuba river begins in an icy lake high in the Donner Pass, and plunges through chiseled granite outcrops and forests of fir before snaking westward above Nevada City, where the river canyons are largely protected from development. During the summer, when she's around, Newsom visits the river every day to take a plunge and hang out with her friends. "It's really perfect," she says, "an amazing, life-giving, life-shaping force." As she describes her lazy afternoons, I am reminded of why people move themselves, and their kids, to the sticks: "There's this river with these incredible rocks and it smells so good and you just lie on them and absorb the sun and then swim in this perfect water and get out again and jive around and play and do weird silly games like walking along on the bottom of the river with a big boulder so you can stay on the bottom." Afterwards, when evening comes, Newsom and her pals might have a barbecue or head up to a Twin Peaks-worthy steak house on the Ridge called The Willo; then they might spend the night drinking or dancing or probably both.

Rough stuff. But Newsom's relationship with the Yuba goes deeper than such idylls. Towards the end of high school, when she was 18, Newsom went down alone to a wild spot along the river. After asking their assistance, she arranged some stones into a



circle, and then sat down within the ring. She stayed in the circle for three days, fasting, facing the river. Her best friend and some pals camped a few miles away, bringing her water and small portions of rice while she slept. She had assigned herself things to do but abandoned them all. She just sat there and watched the river, and, even more, she listened to it.

"I was a completely different person before I went to the river, and a completely different person after," Newsom says. When she first got back the girl was a total wreck. She would start crying when she woke up and not quit until she slept. She stopped going to school. She'd pick up the local paper, and read a headline like "Man Dies in Car Crash," and then the crash would be in her mind, and the man's bloody crumpled body, and his pain and dread and fearful exit from this world. "None of the calluses or borders or walls we put up to protect ourselves from going absolutely insane while experiencing life – none of those stood anymore. They had been worn completely away. I was like infantile and dysfunctional, a weepy, drunk mess."

The Joanna Newsom who tells me this, of course, in no way resembles a dysfunctional weepy mess. She is assured and centered and gracefully goofy—not to mention whatever breed of mastermind you'd have to be to craft something like *Ys*. But that raw and convulsive openness is in her as well. You could say that *Ys* is a balance of all these forces, a marriage of keen design and crazy sensitivity, of intention and play and what she calls "skinlessness." Like a diamond, it gleams from many sides. "Part of the intention was to send a message upwards," says Newsom. "Another was to come to peace with certain things. Another was to find voice for this huge, gaping, wind-howling tunnel that I was looking into and just being like, FUUUCKKK. Not knowing any words for it."

Newsom's vocals are now rich and mercurial—girlish and wizened, nurturing and needy.

Well, she found the words. At times her songs tap into a deep well of lyric lament, the same old blues that inform John Dowland or Skip James or Nick Drake or the obscure 70s she-folkies on Numero Group's recent *Wayfaring Strangers* comp. But though Newsom is a powerfully moving singer-songwriter, she is in no ways a confessional one. *Ys* is no diary, no sloppy heart-to-heart. Its baroque and inventive architecture, like its layers of the orchestration, act as a distancing mechanism that transmutes the emotional turbulence that inspired the work in the first place. Newsom's language, for one thing, is intensely worked. Evocative and sometimes piercingly tender, her lyrics also reflect an almost obsessive attention to old-school poetic stuff like consonance, alliteration, prosody, and internal rhymes. In "Sawdust & Diamonds," when she sings "mute" near "mutiny," the words not only echo phonetically but advance the song's themes of expression and rebellion. Later on in the song, after invoking the puppetry of romance, she introduces the image of a dove –



STRETCHING OUT Newsom's new songs demanded epic lengths—most hover around ten minutes.

*And the little white dove,
Made with love, made with love;
Made with glue, and a glove, and some pliers*

The easy rhyme of dove and love reflects the hackneyed ease of the cliché, which she then promptly takes apart. The word "glove" is a splice of "glue" and "love," held together, as it were, with pliers and glue. This wordplay is not just surface but sense: it reflects the provisional and patched-together quality that exists beneath our idealizations of love, as well as what Newsom calls the "the Frankenstein phenomenon" that emerges when that love actually creates a living being. Newsom says that every line she wrote for the album is significant, that choosing a single word arbitrarily would have been like contaminating or physically erasing the memory of a person or a key event. That's a high bar. At the same time, most of the specific meanings of the lyrics are locked away from the listener in Newsom's memories or dreams or creative imagination. Those who get obsessed with these songs—and there will be many—will find that deep and repeated listening will begin to open up their voices and images, some of which Newsom admits filching from proper literature like *Lolita* and *The Sound and the Fury*. But they'll only reverberate so far—and that's the point. "The whole intention of making a record about all this instead of having a conversation with a best friend is to create an artistic or musical work whose worth is completely separate from the story that I'm trying to tell." This is the paradox of *Ys*: far more than most records, it tells a story, but the story it tells remains hers and hers alone. Just as Newsom

had no desire to make *Ys* an open book, she has no desire to turn interviews into cheesy confessional. For one thing, she doesn't want to strip away the rich ambiguity of the words by explaining too much about their origins. She also dreads the prospect of having a bunch of journalists asking the same questions, over and over, about memories she considers sacred.

"That seems unbearable," she says, pulling her hair back behind her elven ears. But the questions—and the misunderstandings—have already arrived, such as the notion that *Ys* is a "breakup record." She spoke at length with *Arthur* partly because, besides the fact that she actually reads the rag, she hopes to lay certain matters to rest and be done with them.

"There are three specific stories on *Ys*, and maybe five specific characters," she says. "There were two major losses and the knell, the ringing knell of another loss which is continuing, an illness basically." The hammer blow that began this series of hard knocks was the sudden death of Newsom's best friend, "one of the loves of my life." Newsom got the call while she was driving between gigs, during the year when her career was first blowing up. "So mortality is huge on this record. And there's more than one type of death, of course, and that's where the turmoil of the relationship figures in, but not quite as largely as you might suppose."

The sense of loss that overshadows "Emily," the first song on the record, is the kind that comes to all



SINGULARITY Joanna Newsom, first songwriter on Earth to use the word 'asterism' in a lyric.

strong families despite, or perhaps because of, their closeness. As Newsom puts it in the tune: "The ties that bind, they are barbed and spined, and hold us close forever." The song is addressed to Newsom's kid sister, an inveterate traveler who also sings on the track. "In some ways this song is a tribute to her, and in other ways it was like a plea, a letter to her about some stuff that's happening close to home, and a reference to the fact that a lot of the little structures and kingdoms and plans we built when we were younger are just falling to fucking pieces."

Emily majored in astrophysics at UC Berkeley, which helps explain all the astronomical imagery that blazes through this song and occasionally explodes into cosmic epiphany. Newsom's dad is also an amateur starhound, and she remembers him teaching her, over and over again, how to find the dirt red bullet of Arcturus by following the ladle of the Big Dipper. In the song, Newsom maps these overlapping relationships—father to daughters, and Emily's studies to her dad's hobby—with the figure of the asterism, a technical term that describes star clusters whose borders overlap or exist within larger constellations—the Dipper, for example, is an asterism of Ursa Major, the Big Bear.

Asterism is also a twenty dollar word. I had to look it up, and most listeners won't even bother. "I always get shit for using these big words," Newsom admits, laughing. "And that's valid—they can be distracting and take away from pure simple meanings. But other times they truly seem to be the only word that says the exact thing I need them to say." Another mouthful in "Emily" is "hydrocephalic listlessness," an astounding phrase that some maniac out there has already tagged as his myspace name and that Newsom pulls off with a gorgeous, lilting leap into her upper register. A reference to a malady that afflicts someone in Newsom's extended family, the term, like so many here, also does double-duty, evoking the album's heavy atmosphere of ripeness on the verge of decay—in this case, an image of peonies in spring, so full of water that their heads loll like the drugged.

There are lots of images that echo throughout *Ys*—birds, clay, borders, lights—but the most forceful is water in excess. Of course, the image of inundation

is itself saturated with possible meanings—the unconscious or sex or the inevitability of change—but it doesn't really matter because, on this record anyway, the levee definitely breaks. At the close of "Monkey & Bear," a story-song whose animal protagonists play out a fable the sets confinement against the call of the wild, the bear Ursula flees from her monkey mate and master and swims out into the sea. In an almost shamanic process of dismemberment, she sheds her limbs and shoulders, her gut and her coat, which she then uses to catch fish that finally feed her hunger. As the music heaves in shorter and shorter bursts, the song reaches a peak of climax and apotheosis, a split moment "when bear stepped clear of bear."

This weird catharsis clears the air for "Sawdust and Diamonds," the one song Newsom plays without accompaniment and the one whose lyrics most amaze. Though *Ys* is not a breakup album, it's fair to call "Sawdust and Diamonds" a breakup song, though one that shares few sentiments with, say, "Hit the Road Jack" or "There's a Tear in My Beer." Rather than express the anger or grief of the jilted, the song invents itself from the more complicated pain of one who leaves but still loves, whose heart is doubled over and turned against itself. The tension between containment and rebellion recurs, along with images that explode beyond sense with a visionary, dreamlike power—a bell falling down white stairs, a belfry burning sky-high, a pair of marionettes that couple before an admiring audience. In the end, the song is not about couples per se but the forces that move them, for good and ill. "You would have seen me through / But I could not undo that desire," Newsom sings over an aching repeated arpeggio. Then she turns and addresses her desire directly, repeating the word with a plaintive ferocity that's both resigned and supplicant.

"Only Skin" is the longest, most obscure, and least shapely of the album's songs, the one that detractors will most readily point to as evidence of Newsom's art-rock self-indulgence. I've listened to it tons, and it's grown on me, and the peaks are worth the valleys. It was the last song she wrote, and the one where, perhaps foolishly, she attempted to weave together all the various threads and "ghost characters" in her tale. "It was an attempt to encapsulate everything, and to find some measure of grace." In her 2004 Arthur interview, Newsom described her patchwork method of writing songs: "I have little objects and every once in a while I take them out of my pockets, lay them all in a row and I like the way they look next to each other, so that's a song!" Here the row of items goes on for pages. Most revealing, perhaps, is Newsom's admission that the last few verses of the song—where the long-suffering female protagonist promises to do right by her darling—are the only place in the whole album where she just made stuff up, where the song steps away from poetic autobiography. "I was hoping for a good resolution, but I felt helpless and foundering at the end. And so I reached for this fiction, because I didn't know how to end the song in full truth. Otherwise, it would go on forever."

Ys ends where the story began: with the death of Newsom's best friend. "Cosmia" is a composed rather than wrenching elegy, and the most conventionally structured of the five songs. The engulfing waters of the rest of the album are here channeled into a river, a site of solitude and communion. In the long line of beasts and critters that inhabit the rest of the record—meadowlarks and monkeys and horses and hens—here Newsom calls in the moth, the final form of what William Blake called "animal forms of wisdom." After the singer gets the devastating news, she walks into a cornfield,

and moths almost drown her. Later, she invokes the classic image of moths immolating themselves in the artificial sun of a porch-light—those attractive but dubious goals towards which so many of us so readily plunge. But here the image contrasts with the possibility of a farther and greater illumination, a "true light."

Like the whole record, "Cosmia" affirms life without offering a wisp of false consolation. "The thing that I was experiencing and dwelling on the entire time is that there are so many things that are not okay and that will never be okay again," says Newsom. "But there's also so many things that are okay and good that sometimes it makes you crumple over with being alive. We are allowed such an insane depth of beauty and enjoyment in this lifetime. It's what my Dad talks about sometimes. He says the only way that he knows there's a God is that there's so much gratuitous joy in this life. And that's his only proof. There's so many joys that do not assist in the propagation of the race or self-preservation. There's no point whatsoever. They are so excessively, mind-bogglingly joy-producing that they distract from the very functions that are supposed to promote human life. They can leave you stupefied, monastic, not productive in any way, shape or form. And those joys are there and they are unflagging and they are ever-growing. And still there are these things that you will never be able to feel okay about—unbearably awful, sad, ugly, unfair things." We are getting near the heart of things, and so I ask her, wondering myself, if you can experience such gratuitous joy without the trauma of skinlessness. "Maybe not. It's possible that if you are not open to one of those experiences you can't be open to the other. It requires a sloughing off of a particular sort of emotional callus, and you're probably shedding the same block, the same blunting mechanism in terms of joy and in terms of sorrow. And maybe you go through a million regenerations of that in your lifetime, feeling very blunted, and then feeling very exposed and over sensitive."

"So where are you now?"

"I may be rewarding myself with a nice long numbing bath," she laughs.

ARRANGING Newsom is an impressively late riser, and though I showed up at three she still hasn't had her coffee. So she pulls on a brown knit cap and we bundle into her dusty Subaru Forester and head towards Ike's Quarter Café, a neo-creole joint in downtown Nevada City. Over the gorgeous, elegiac folk sounds of the forthcoming PG Six record, she talks about how clumsy and disorganized she can be, especially when she's performing. She invariably spills water on herself, and once slipped in a puddle of beer at the Swedish American Hall and landed on her ass smack-dab in front of the audience, ripping her dress. "I'm eternally indebted to any journalist who was there because not a single person mentioned the incident."

We arrive at Ike's and settle in to an outdoor booth shaded by vines and trellises. Newsom's speaking voice is almost as variable as her singing one, and when we place our orders, as when she says "please" or "thanks" or "hello", the boopsy factor goes up a notch, which is particularly amusing when the order in question is a medium-rare cheeseburger with bacon and a side of horseradish cream. Though a strict vegetarian for years, Newsom is clearly one no longer, and as a fellow veggie backslider, I relax. (Both of us, it turns out, started eating meat



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Some of the most tripped out and divinely inspired music ever put on record, "Penetration" is considered by many to be Ya Ho Wba 13's finest achievement. Led by cosmic guru, Father Tod and a number of revolving musicians, which even included Sky Saxon of The Seeds.

Anonymous
Inside The Shadow
Lost Indianapolis Psych Pop gem originally issued as a private pressing in 1976. Very reminiscent of The Byrds and Jefferson Airplane-esque harmonizing (only better!).



again after having carnivorous dreams.) She wants to go hunting sometime with her uncle Dave, who occasionally makes the cover of hunting and fishing magazines and likes to bag wild turkeys in the area. "But I'm pretty sure that when it came down to the wire it would be too difficult for me emotionally, which makes me feel like a huge hypocrite."

Hypocrite or not, Newsom is capable of eating steak everyday when she is on tour, just to ground herself amidst the chaos. "I'm not a good traveler," she says. "If I wasn't touring I would probably almost never travel. On tour, I just get so drained and bonkers and fragile. Totally cuckoo. Very small things seem insurmountable."

Things go much better when she travels with people she digs, like when her friend Jamie accompanies her on tour, or the time Newsom took a road trip with her boyfriend Bill, just as she was thinking about how to shape her new songs into an album. Bill is Bill "Smog" Callahan, a Drag City label mate who met Newsom on tour. (She made a guest appearance on his 2005 record *A River Ain't Too Much To Love*.) For the trip Callahan bought Newsom a copy of *Song Cycle*, which Van Dyke Parks released in 1968, when the musician was just about Newsom's age. Parks is best known for collaborating with Brian Wilson on the lyrics for *Smile*, but his single greatest work remains this art-pop head-trip through the American musical landscape. Newsom listened to it for three days straight. She was already thinking about fleshing out her songs with orchestral arrangements, and told her fella that she wanted to work with someone who scores like Van Dyke Parks. "Well, perhaps you should ask Van Dyke actual Parks," he said.

So she did. The couple were already heading towards Los Angeles, and Drag City arranged for her and a harp and Mr. and Mrs. Parks to all meet up in a hotel room, where Newsom played him all give songs in one fell swoop. Newsom was hoping he'd agree to score one song, but Parks told her he wanted to take on the whole thing.

Parks may not have known what he was getting himself into. Newsom knows what she wants musically and is not shy about saying it. Of all of Parks' initial arrangements, only the score for "Monkey & Bear" worked for her out of the gate—which is perhaps not surprising, given that Parks' first paying gig in Hollywood was scoring "Bear Necessities" for Disney's *Jungle Book*. But all the other arrangements required an exhaustive back and forth between Newsom and Parks; even then, none of the arrangements for "Stardust & Diamonds" ever felt right, which is why Newsom decided to leave the song unadorned, an intimate clearing in the midst of a forest of sounds. After half of year of working remotely on their shared vision, Newsom went to Parks' home studio in LA to sift through the final written score bar by bar. "He'd leave the room to go to cook his family dinner and I would just sit there combing through everything."

"I've never had a bigger challenge," Parks told the webzine *Bandoppler* about working with Newsom. "Or more joy in discovery." You can certainly hear the joy. In "Emily," which features his most innovative contribution to the album, the orchestration both echoes and tickles the lyrics – a long minor chord follows her mention of shadows, while a goofy banjo appears when she sings about her Pa. One point of friction that occurred during the recording sessions was Parks' desire to add electric bass and electric guitar. "I was like Hell no," Newsom says. But Parks, who also contributed accordion to the album, went ahead and called in two great session players of the old school, Grant Geissman and Lee Sklar. "What they added was unbelievably important and grounding," Newsom says. "I'm so glad that Van

Dyke insisted on that." Another bone of contention was Newsom's insistence on recording the orchestra to analog tape, something that has probably not been done in LA since the Rodney King riots. Newsom always wanted an all-analog project, and rehearsed the familiar arguments with Parks: analog recordings capture more information than digital, and are richer and warmer-sounding to boot. Parks agreed with her, but also pointed out that analog was a pain in the ass. Newsom kept on it, though, and eventually got her way. "It was definitely difficult but a lot of the difficulties weren't things I, um, had to personally deal with."

I asked Newsom why she was so insistent about analog. "Just instinct," she says, her green eyes lighting up. "I just thought it would be so rad to do a fully analog all-orchestral recording. It would be so incredible to be get to hear the vinyl version and put that out there. That was the dream driving me the whole time."

ANALOG The hoary debate over analog vs. digital recording usually grinds through its fated moves over issues of technical fidelity and sensual perceptions like "warmth" and "sharpness." But the wrangle also has a more intangible dimension, one that's emotional, cultural, almost metaphysical. Analog and digital aren't just different ways of handling sound – they are different metaphors about how we mirror and model the world. The term analog comes from analogy—the undulating grooves on your vinyl LP (and, more complexly, the magnetic fields captured and reproduced by the metal filings on magnetic tape) are very much like the material undulations of sound waves in the air. Digital comes from digit: an abstract numerical representation of a single slice of flowing sound, sampled at such a rate as to closely approximate a continuous wave. Analog hugs more tightly to the ways of the earth, with its flows and inevitable physical decay. Digital, which hypes the eternal life of the perfect copy, tends to dematerialize and disincarnate—just compare an MP3 or DJ software to an old 78 or a pedal harp. Faced with the dominant empire of the digital, some people don't just choose to make or listen to more analog recordings. They choose to live more analog lives.

Take, for example, one Joanna Newsom, who was born two years before the first Macintosh appeared and has followed up her Ike's cheeseburger with a pint of Anderson Valley ale. She owns a computer but doesn't get the Internet at her house and has to take it to a café for email. She uses the machine to make CD mixes for friends, but never plays music from it. She doesn't own an MP3 player. When Newsom moved into her new house, she noticed the perfect spot for a CD player, which she had never owned. But she opted against it. (She does play CDs in her car.) "I decided that a good choice as far as sanity goes was to just have analog sounds in the house. I do have a digital camera and I'm fine with that. But sound affects the brain and the mood so much. It seemed like a good thing to just rule out any possibility of a crispy mosquito of digital sound boring into your brain. Just rule it out of the home environment."

Newsom learned a lot about listening to music from her boyfriend, for whom vinyl recordings are as much an invitation as a storage medium. "The way he listens to music is one of the most endearing and sweet things I've ever seen," she says, taking a sip of her beer. "He takes off his shoes, sets them down and gets comfortable. He kneels or sits in front of the record player, lifts the cover, reverently chooses a record, puts it on, closes the cover and just listens, start

to finish. Whenever I go to see him and we listen to music like that, I register in myself how much better it feels than other ways of listening, which are like rushing to eat a meal because you're super-hungry. You need to eat, just like you need to listen to music, but it never feels good if you do it like that. So I am trying to set my life up in a way where I don't have to listen to music anyway other than putting on a record and sitting and listening."

Newsom recorded her own performance for *Ys* with Steve Albini, who has recorded thousands of musicians and works strictly with analog. (Albini once offered this thunderous prophecy on the back of his old band Big Black's *Songs About Fucking*: "the future belongs to the analog loyalists. fuck digital") Albini and Newsom met at LA's slick Village Recording Studios, where Todd Rundgren was recording Meatloaf in the studio next door. Nonetheless, Albini had to go through five tape machines before getting one to work, and that one he had to fix himself. "It was a really embarrassing scenario," says Albini. "It's not like we were in some cheap-shit chop shop. I've made records in people's living rooms that went better from a technical standpoint." Once he cobbled together a studio, Albini then faced the challenge of recording the harp. "It's a quiet instrument. It doesn't excite the room much, so you have to work close to it, but because it's physically large you can't just stick a mic up close to it." Albini wound up placing four small Crown GLM mics, which are about the size of a kitchen match, along the instrument's resonating belly. A nearby mic picked up the stereo image of Newsom playing, and a distant mic picked up the reverberant sound of the room. "It was fun," says Albini, who enjoyed working with Newsom, a woman he describes simply as "bad ass."

The album was mixed by another analog enthusiast, the guitarist and producer Jim O'Rourke. The mixdown took place at New York's Sear Sound, a legendary shrine to analog recording run by Walter Sear, a Joe Meeks-like figure who once sold synths with Robert Moog. This is what Newsom told O'Rourke she wanted: "I want the vocal and harp performances to feel central and grounded and close and intimate and still, as though they are taking place in a small space very close to the listener. I want the orchestra to feel hallucinatory and constantly shifting in space and I want it to be mixed in a way that relates to the story being told and the lyrics and the mood very closely." After slaving two 24-track machines together to accommodate all the tracks, O'Rourke did a rough mix by instinct before returning for detail work. He methodically went through each track, following it from beginning to end with a flying fader, constantly modulating, creating an ever-changing landscape of sound that accorded with the shifts and undulations of the songs. He also cut out sections of Van Dyke Parks' arrangements, arguing that the gorgeous details that the arranger and Newsom had so painstakingly worked out were not always in service to the songs, which sometimes demanded greater intimacy. Everyone knew that Parks' arrangements might be cut back in the mix, but they worked hard to find the right balance. "Hopefully he's happy with the results," says Newsom.

One day at the studio, O'Rourke told Newsom he had a vision for an ad for the record. "It's just a picture of you. Above it says Music, and below it says Is Back." O'Rourke was not kissing ass. In an email, he wrote that Newsom's record recalled and confirmed why he fell in love with music in the first place. "It's someone's vision seen all the way through—sweat lost, brain racked, soul searched, and fingers calloused. I doubt we'll hear anything as brilliant in a long, long time."

After *Ys* was mastered at Abbey Road and chopped into digital bits, advance CDs were, as usual, sent out to music scribes. Newsom expected that the record would leak onto the Net, an inevitable phenomenon



and not necessarily a bad one. But *Ys* did not leak—it surged through a broken dam. The word (and the downloads) spread through muso sites and beyond, to places that would normally not give a fig for Ms. Joanna Newsom, who, needless to say, was not particularly pleased.

Newsom had exerted her creative control throughout the entire creation of the album, and now she had lost it. Though *Ys* probably gained more in publicity than it lost in future sales, that didn't matter to the artist, who is a quality-over-quantity gal, and does not really cotton to such a calculus. She wants her album to be taken whole, as the old-school *Album it is*: a thematic and developmental sequence of songs wrapped up in a nifty package with a gorgeous cover, a beautifully-designed booklet for lyrics, and, ideally, a nice big gatefold sleeve. "I want anyone who has the record to feel like it's this little object of some worth or substance," she says. "So much stuff is throwaway nowadays and I wanted it to not feel that way. Ironically, of course, it leaked on the Internet, which is like the epitome of throwaway, or at least intangibility." Indeed, there was something almost mythic about the whole affair. It was as if the archons of the digital needed to visibly humiliate Newsom, with her brazen and well-publicized invocation of the old ways.

PORTRAIT A week before I met Newsom, when I was trawling Joanna fansites for bootlegs, I sampled some of the chatter about *Ys* and discovered that the most controversial aspect of the album by far was the cover portrait of Newsom. Some bitched about the "Ren Faire costume," and others compared the image to the cover of a fantasy novel. These reactions are understandable but still pretty lame. A great *Album* requires a great cover, and Benjamin Vierling's painting—which looks like a Dürer by way of Millais, but more pop-surrealist—is pretty great. Luminescent, esoteric, and vividly detailed, it mirrors Newsom's moodier new material as much as the strange and playful embroidery of Emily Prince's cover complemented *Mender*. In the portrait, Newsom sits stiffly in an old oak chair, wearing a plain brown maiden's dress, a broad leather belt, and a wreath of wheat and flowers in her loosely braided hair. She is framed by a horse skull, a blackbird, and more flowers, some of which—like the poppy in her hair and the morning glories surrounding her chair—are visionary plants. The color of the morning glories, which are somehow growing out of the floorboards, echoes the hues of the sky. The outside is within, they seem to say, just as the ordered, formal composition is fringed with wildness. But the symbolic heart of the painting lies in Newsom's hands. Like the skull on the wall, the nicked sickle in her left hand is a *memento mori*, a reminder of death, its lunar shape echoed by the airplane contrail in the sky, another image of impermanence. In her right hand, she holds a framed and mounted specimen of the order *Lepidoptera*. At first I took the critter to be a butterfly, which made sense, if for no other reason than the fact that Newsom loves Nabokov. The butterfly also represents the transformative emergence from a death-like state, and is a traditional symbol of the soul (the Greek word *psyche*, or soul, also means butterfly). But after a round of late-night Google searching, I finally

discovered that the thing is actually a moth—a *Cosmia* moth, to be exact, pinned and framed and protected, after a fashion, from the ravages of time.

I wanted to see this painting in all its original glory, and so Newsom and I finish our Solstice ales and drive over to Vierling's studio in downtown Grass Valley, which lies close to Nevada City. We arrive at St. Joseph's Hall, a ramshackle former convent and orphanage now given over to artist studios and the occasional concert. Climbing the shadowy exterior stairwell, I am not surprised to hear from Newsom that this place too is haunted.

Vierling's small studio is orderly and calm, and the 31-year-old man, who Newsom pegs as an "old soul," is thoughtful, friendly and gently reserved. The Newsom portrait is radiant. Its luminosity and juicy detail are the result of a laborious and exacting process of applying alternate layers of egg tempera and oil, an old-school technique that took Vierling six months to execute. Too eclectic to call himself a true traditionalist, Vierling is most directly inspired by the Nazarenes, a nineteenth-century group of German mystical painters who rejected the mannered styles of their day and looked back to medieval and early Renaissance models. As Vierling wrote in an email, "The Nazarenes glorified medieval art because it embodied a paradox: the perfection of the ideal as God intended, in contrast with the entropic negation that all matter is subject to." This attitude—which Vierling rightly says is more Gnostic than Catholic— influences his own dogma-free approach to sacred art. "I believe that a painting has the ability to reflect back to the viewer the image of what exists behind the subject, the spirit behind Matter if you will. It is my goal to reveal what is eternal in the subject, be it an object or a person."

Vierling did not paint Newsom's face from life or from a photograph, but from an image in his mind he constructed after studying scores of photographs taken of the singer from various angles. Some fans have complained that the portrait does not really resemble Newsom, but having spent half a day with her, I would counter that her face itself is mercurial. (And, except for the wreath, she is certainly not wearing a costume.) The painting's most excellent likeness, though, are Newsom's hands, which are also Vierling's favorite part of the picture. They are strong and lovely and articulate. Like the music on *Ys*, Vierling's rendering brings together an expressive, spiritual exuberance with an almost clinical execution of detail and technique. "The alchemists called it the *Magnum Opus*, the great work," wrote Vierling. "I call it a painting. It might just as well be a song, a verse, or even digital code. It is what you invest into it, nothing more or less."

MYTH The last element of Newsom's magnum opus to arrive was its title. Newsom spent a long time fishing for a name that would encapsulate the spirit of the project. One night she dreamed about the title, a swirling reverie that featured the letters Y and S smashing together in unusual combinations. Afterwards she began searching for a single-syllable word that bluntly combined the two letters. At the same time, Newsom also finally got around to reading the fantasy novel on her nightstand, which happened to be her best friend's favorite book. She thought the novel might be cheesy, but she loved it. And one night, there it was: a passage about a seaside castle that had been raised "by the magic of the ancient folk of *Ys*"

Et voila—Newsom had found her title. *Ys*, pronounced *ees*, is a lost city immortalized in the folklore of Brittany, a region that lies along the northwest coast of France. But as Newsom read more deeply into the legend, things got a little spookier. Here, in a nutshell, is one version of the tale: Dahut, the blond daughter of King Gradlon, begs her father to build her a citadel by the sea. And so he does, creating a city that's protected from the waves by an enormous wall of stone whose one entrance, a gigantic bronze door, is opened by a key that Gradlon carries around his neck. Like a lot of seaside towns, *Ys* attracts horny sailors laden with goods, and Dahut makes a wicked pact with the powers of the ocean to make the already decadent city rich. The agreement is rather kinky: every night the princess takes a new sailor as a lover, and

places a black mask on his head. In the morning, when the song of the meadowlark is heard, the mask strangles the guy, whose body is then offered to the waves. Eventually Dahut meets her match: a haughty crimson-clad lover who persuades her to slip the key from around the neck of her sleeping father. The rake then opens the gates of *Ys* to the raging ocean, which swallows the city. Father and daughter escape on a magic steed, but daddy is forced to drop the princess into the sea and she drowns. In some tellings, she is then transformed into a mermaid.

Newsom saw so many parallels between this story and her own that it freaked her out. There were the themes of decadence and excess, of fathers and daughters and boundaries burst, not to mention details like the meadowlark and the heroine's underwater metamorphosis. Then Newsom stumbled across the clincher: according to Breton folklore, on calm days along the coast you can hear the sunken bell of the cathedral of *Ys*, tolling evermore. Later, as Newsom finished the fantasy novel, she stumbled across yet another uncanny echo of her own tale: a line that spoke of "that damnable bell," a direct sample, as it were, from "Sawdust & Diamonds."

"To me that seemed like a chiming confirmation, that all was at it should be," says Newsom. Such synchronicities had ghosted her throughout the project, as the interwoven stories of her convulsive year became even more bound together in her lyrical retelling of them. That, of course, is one of the gifts of the creative imagination: a sort of gratuitous grace that can shelter us from the gaping sky, an excess of meaning that is capable of redeeming the mess we're in without denying how fucked up it is. Many of us have sensed a secret logic working through our lives, and at first Newsom resisted it.

"I fought angrily against seeing particular types of poetic organization because it seemed awful to see my own life and these actual events in that way. But when you put forth an intention into the universe to speak a certain truth and narrate a certain period of your life, you start to see the sorts of symmetries that you are not usually supposed to be able to see until you are on your deathbed and your life flashes before your eyes. And you see exactly why everything happened. And even the most painful things you've ever been through can seem unbearably beautiful!"





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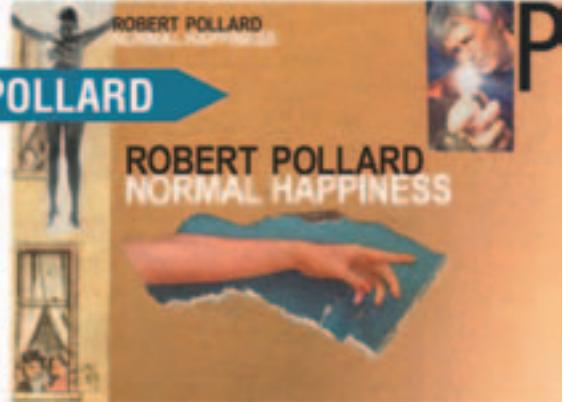
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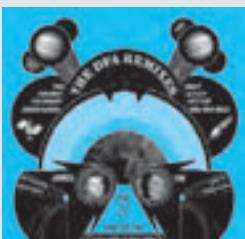
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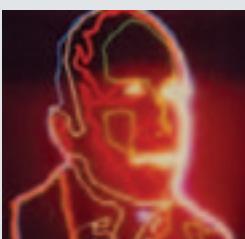
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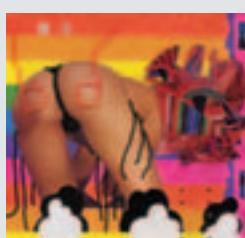
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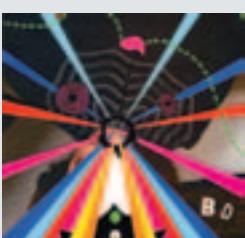
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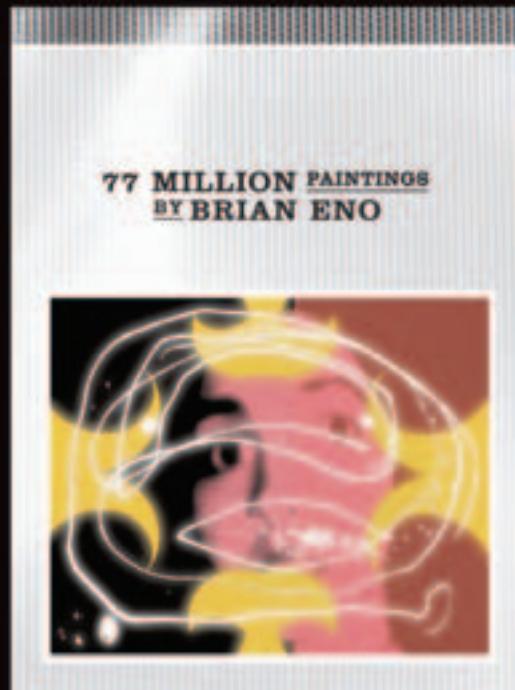


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-J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*

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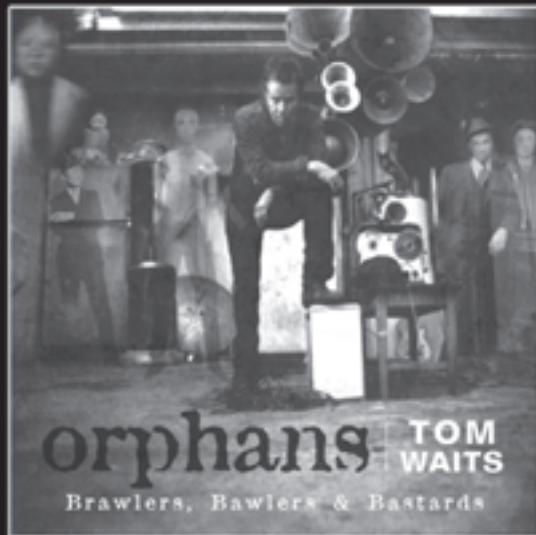
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NEW MUTATIONS FOR WINTER 2006

TOTIMOSH LADRON

The fourth album from Oakland, CA fuzz mystics TOTIMOSH. Cryptic metal visions course through slabs of crushing metered riffing and joyous ecstatic sludge oozing from the band's instruments. Sunbaked vocal harmonies and flourishes of pure pop melody intermingle alongside bursts of old school heavy metal energy and smoldering post-punk dynamics that are clad in serious heftosity. TOTIMOSH's elephantine rock grips the listener in the power of the big riff and their saw-toothed hooks as it reconciles HEAVY HIGH ON FIRE/KARP-style cash with pop and gay chandeliers, bolstered by powerful production courtesy of HELMET's Page Hamilton.

BLACK ELK BLACK ELK

Portland, Oregon's BLACK ELK unleashes a deranged conglom of carnivorous, charred hardcore punk, sludgy power of primo Northwest, tar pit rawk, twitchy Midwestern noise rage somewhere between Am Rep circa 1991 and a more frenzied out OLE KREUZEN, all swarming together into a goateed, psychedelic backwoods black mass dance party that has risen to a fever pitch. Produced by Mike Easton at Smeagol Studios (EARTH, THRONES, JACK-O-MOTHERFUCKERS).

MICROWAVES CONTAGION HEURISTIC

In the anti-tradition of wheebread Bay Area thrash metal, the violent noisots of New York no-wave and a familiarity with Ralph Records' 90's insanity, MICROWAVES draw from a palette that is somehow as wide as it seems limited. Spiked skunk infested guitar spit, toroily impoured riffs like so much chaff from a surgically calibrated tree-shredder while a propulsive feral bass assault is jarrred through all manner of alien effects, often rendering it as more a bowel-rumbling presence than an actual instrument. The percussive cyborg clatter and paranoid dual vocal attack serve to further blast MICROWAVES' dystopian thrash into the outer void.

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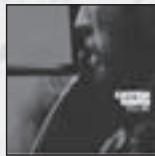
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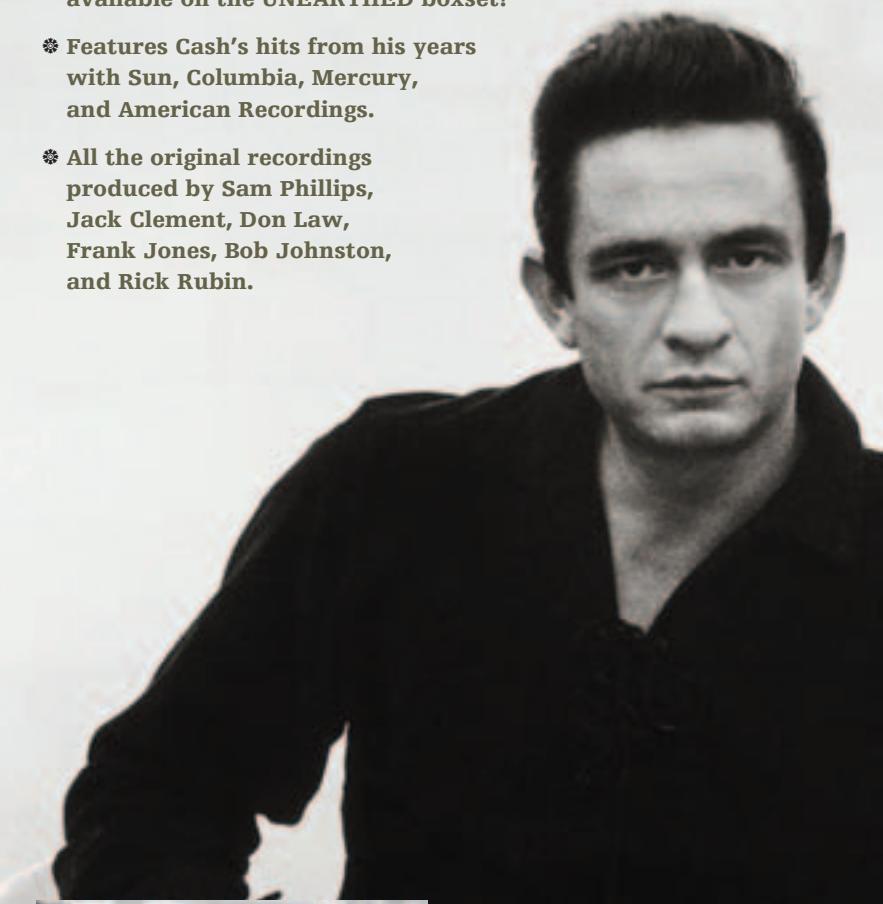
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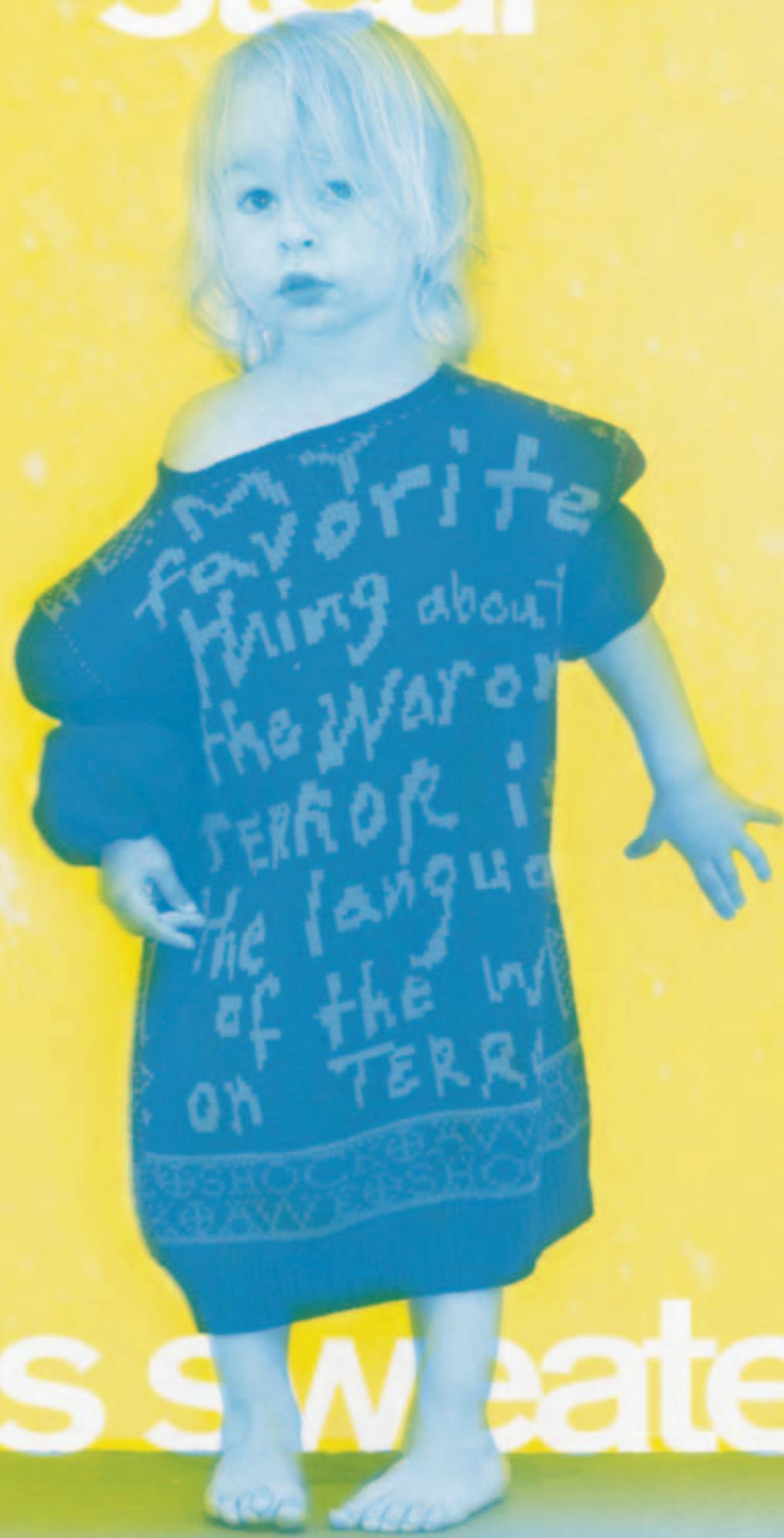
Lisa Anne Auerbach, a Los Angeles-based knitter, recently participated in a group show at the non-profit New York art space, **White Columns**.

Director **Matthew Higgs** invited Lisa Anne to hang ten of her sweaters in the gallery. When we arrived, there were only six. Photographer **Justine Kurland** captured this mother and child trying them on.

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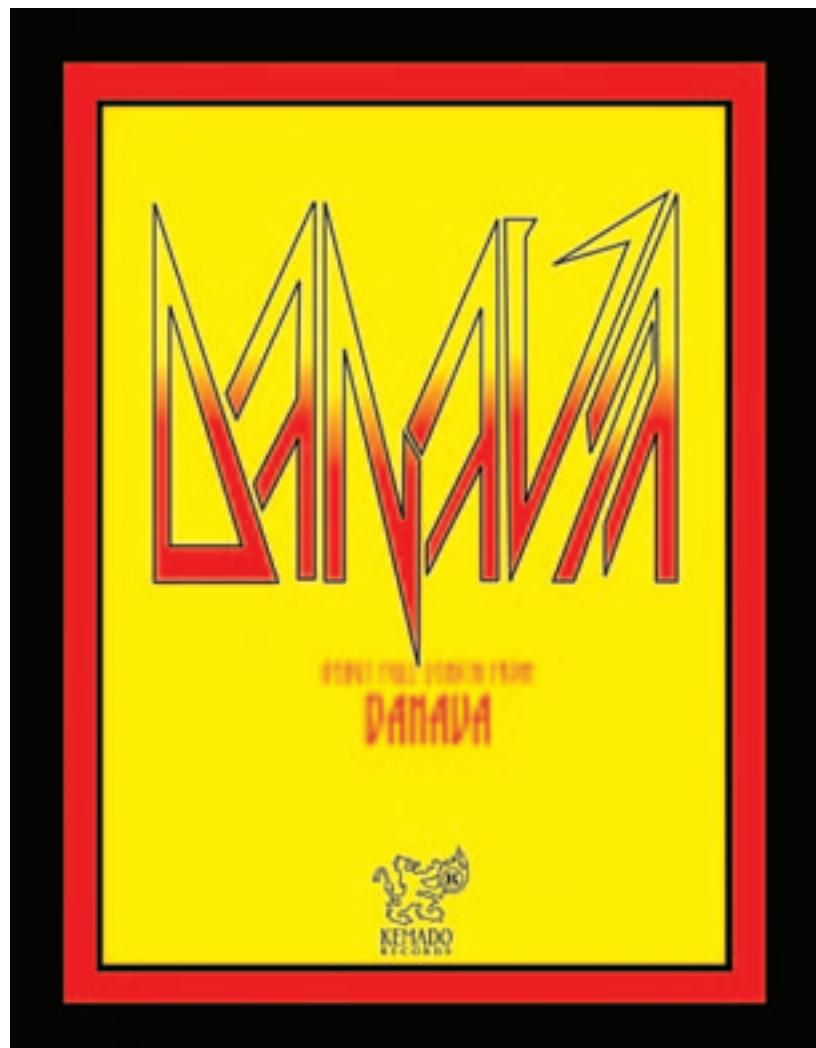
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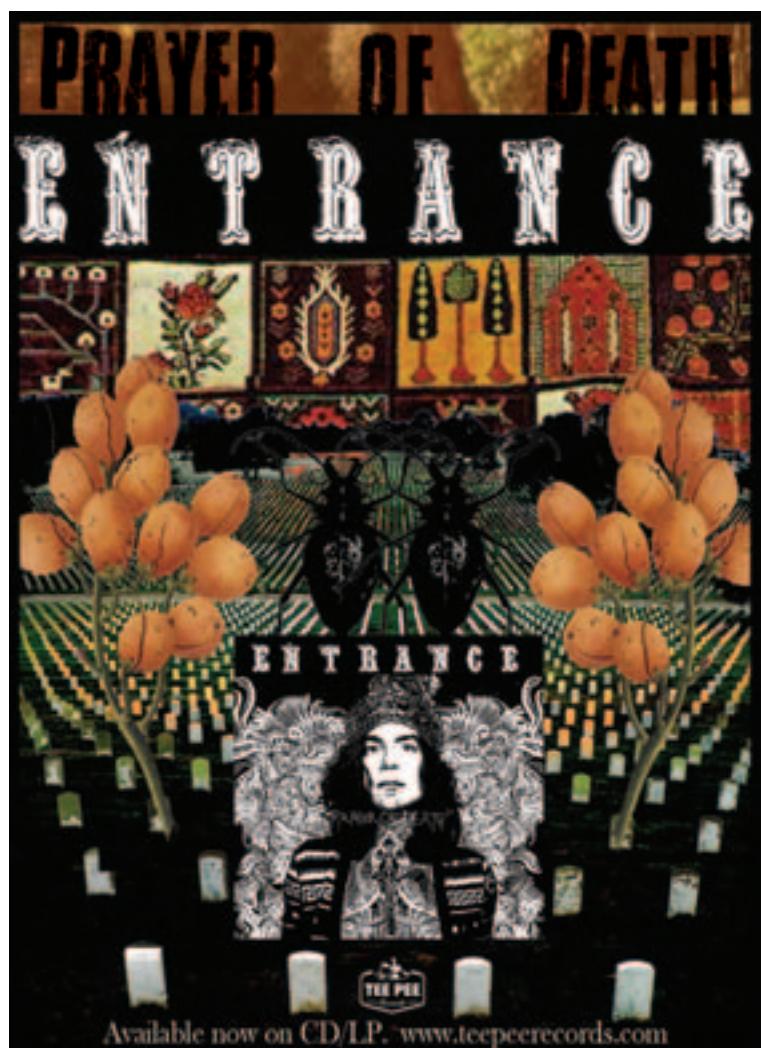


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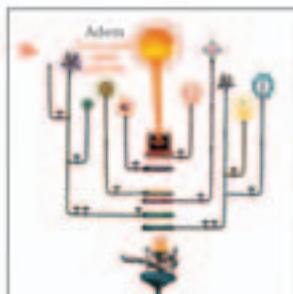
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Love And Other Planets

This London singer/songwriter ups the ante in terms of sonics and songwriting ambition on his second album, leaping into experimentation while keeping his strong melodies and heartfelt delivery. It's a far-reaching and beautiful record, bound together by a truly universal concept.

DOMINO



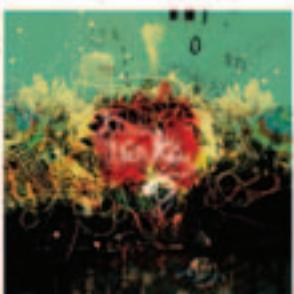
EL PERRO DEL MAR

El Perro Del Mar

The domestic version of El Perro Del Mar's debut album includes the track 'Shake It Off,' not found on the import.

"Scandinavian grief has never felt as good as this" - *Exclaim*
"8.1" - *Pitchfork*

THE CONTROL GROUP



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Birthday Party

Blending modern flavor with old-world charm, *Birthday Party* glimmers with a timeless yet quirky pop panache. Primarily guitars, mandolin, vocals, and percussion, but the structure, songwriting, and execution suggests a contemporary pop spirit, rich with rock grandeur. Welcome to the year of The Wink.

ACHE



SOME ACTION

The Band Who Sucked The Life Out...

Some Action harkens to the great days of Crypt Records, while maintaining a guilty-pleasure pop aesthetic. In fact, listeners report having more fun listening to the record than having sex, which either means New York's more dead than we thought, or that Some Action are living up to their name.

GIGANTIC MUSIC



THE WALKMEN

Pusty Cats Starring The Walkmen

The Walkmen pay tribute to the "Lost Weekend" of 1974 with a song-for-song cover of *Pussy Cats*, the classic Harry Nilsson/John Lennon collaboration. *Pussy Cats Starring The Walkmen* is for anyone who's ever loved anything about music.

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SIMON DAWES

Carnivore

Over the past two years Simon Dawes has been established as a band to watch by touring with The Walkmen, Eidey, The Ravenettes and Band Of Horses.

RECORD COLLECTION

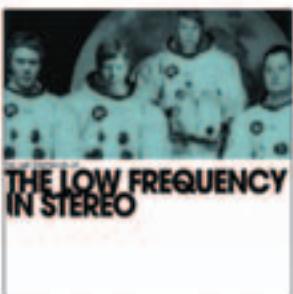


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BOG VENUS vs. NAZI COCK-RING

SOME THOUGHTS CONCERNING PORNOGRAPHY,

BY ALAN MOORE



WHETHER WE SPEAK PERSONALLY or Palaeo-anthropologically, it's fair to say we humans start out fiddling with ourselves. Our improved scan technology reveals that most of us commence a life of self-pollution while in utero, while if we trace our culture back to the first artefacts that showed we had a culture, then we find ourselves confronted by a hubcap-headed humming-top of tits and ass carved lovingly from limestone, excavated from an Aurignacian settlement discovered in a Northeast Austrian village known as Willendorf. The mighty Robert Crumb, back in his awesomely prolific Weirdo days, depicted the creator of the first Venus of Willendorf as Caveman Bob, a neurasthenic outcast with a strong resemblance to Crumb himself, perpetually horny, crouching in his cave and whacking off over the big-butt fetish woman he'd just made: *Homo erectus*.

Crumb's point, in all probability, was that while she may well have functioned as a magic icon to induce fertility, and while to modern eyes she stands as an example of the prehistoric genesis of art, Willendorf Venus was an object of arousal in the eyes of her creator, was a piece of stone-age stroke material, primal pornography. He may also have been saying that if we trace culture to its very origins, we find its instigator to be an obsessive smut-hound and compulsive masturbator much like Crumb himself, or me, or you, or any of us if we are to be entirely candid.

Humans, whether individually while in the womb or as a species newly climbed down from the treetops that we'd shared with kissing-cousin Bonobos, discover early on that sexual self-stimulation is a source of great gratification, practically unique in our experience as mammals in that it is easily achievable and, unlike almost every other primitive activity, can be accomplished without risk of being maimed or eaten. Also, it can be acquired completely free of charge, which may well be a factor in society's subsequent attempts to regulate the sexual imagination, and which is a point to which we'll be returning later.

This is not to say, of course, that all society is a direct result of chronic Onanism, although I can see how one might come to that conclusion. Rather, it is to suggest that our impulse towards pornography has been with us since thumbs were first opposable, and that back at the outset of our bipedal experiment we saw it as a natural part of life, one of the nicer parts at that, and as a natural subject for our proto-artists.

Lest this be seen as a reinforcement of the view that porn is wholly a Neanderthal pursuit, we should perhaps consider ancient Greece and the erotic friezes that adorned its civic centres; the magnificently sculpted marble figure of the god Pan violating many of our current barnyard statutes and a really slutty nanny-goat in the bargain. Images like these were clearly seen as eminently suitable Grecian street-furniture, depictions of an aspect of mammalian existence that all mammals knew about already and were comfortable regarding, and which no one from the youngest child to the most pious priest needed protecting from. In bygone Greece we see a culture plainly unperturbed by its erotic inclinations, largely saturated by both sexual imagery and sexual narratives. We also see a culture where these attitudes would seem to have worked out quite well, both for the ancient Greeks and for humanity at large. They may well have been hollow-eyed and hairy-palmed erotomaniacs, but on the plus side they invented science, literature, philosophy and, well, civilization, as it turns out.

Sexual openness and cultural progress would seem pretty much to have walked hand in hand throughout the opening chapters of the human story in the West, and it wasn't until the advent of Christianity, or more specifically of the apostle Paul, that anybody realized we should all be thoroughly ashamed of both our bodies and those processes relating to them. Not until the Emperor Constantine had cut and pasted modern Christianity together from loose scraps of Mithraism and the solar cult of Sol Invictus, adopting the resultant theological collage as the

religion of the Roman Empire, did we get to witness the effect of its ideas and doctrines when enacted on a whole society.

If we take a traditional (and predominantly Christian) view of the collapse of Rome, then conventional wisdom tells us that Rome was destroyed by decadence, sunken beneath the rising scum-line of its orgies, of its own sexual permissiveness. The merest skim through Gibbon, on the other hand, will demonstrate that Rome had been a heaving, decadent and orgiastic fleshpot more or less since its inception. It had fornicated its way quite successfully through several centuries without showing any serious signs of harm as a result. Once Constantine had introduced compulsory Christianity to the Empire, though, it barely lasted for another hundred years.

Largely, this was because Rome had relied on foreign troops, on cavalry from Egypt for example, to defend the Empire against the Teutonic hordes surrounding it. Foreign soldiers were originally happy to enlist, since Rome at that point took a pagan and syncretic standpoint that allowed recruits to worship their own gods while they were off in Northern Europe holding back the Huns. Once the Empire had been Christianised, however, that was not an option. Rome's new Christian leaders had decided it was their way or the stairway, and so consequently, off in distant lands, recruitment figures plummeted. The next thing anybody knew, there were barbarians everywhere: the Huns, the Franks, the Visigoths and worst of all the Goths with their white single contact lenses and Cradle of Filth collections. Rome, effectively, was over bar the shouting.

So, to recap on what we have learned so far: sexually open and progressive cultures such as ancient Greece have given the West almost all of its civilizing aspects, whereas sexually repressive cultures like late Rome have given us the Dark Ages.

Let us fast-forward for almost a thousand years of Saxons, Danes and Vikings ripped on Fly Agaric pillaging and raping their way through some sort of meteoric nuclear winter with brains dripping from their axes, howling about Odin and blood-eagling anybody who chose not to do the same. When lights eventually started to come on again across the western world, we find a Christian church that's understandably concerned about attracting worshippers onto its rough-hewn pews and which had hit upon the notion of erotic art as one way of accomplishing this end. The spread-legged figure with a splayed vagina found crouched in the masonry of many medieval British churches, mis-identified as a Sheelagh-na-gig, as a leftover mother-goddess from some earlier religion, was in fact



of purely Christian origin and was originally intended as an image representing Lust. If the folklorists had looked harder then they would have almost certainly found similar depictions of Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, Avarice and all the other deadly sins, although that petrified and gaping pussy does tend to seize more than its fair share of the attention, which is probably no accident. In churches of that period, displays of pornographic imagery were not at all uncommon, nor were they by any stretch of the imagination unintentional. Pictures of people copulating were a big draw when it came to pulling in the congregations, after all, and were not sinful in themselves if they could be explained away as warnings to the faithful; stern moral instructions to describe the shameful acts that, were they actually committed, would result in certain hellfire and damnation.

What the church had actually accomplished with this crowd-pleasing manoeuvre was a subtle and yet massively important change in the relationship between the population and its sexual imagination. Implicitly, it was acceptable to enjoy sexual imagery as long as you accepted also that such acts were sinful, and felt suitably ashamed and guilty if you were in any way aroused by their depiction. This is established the immediate link between perusal of pornography and intense self-loathing or embarrassment, which still obtains today throughout most of the western world.

It wasn't just the early church, of course, that enjoyed a monopoly on images of naked flesh. Until the nineteenth century, the only way an artist could portray the unclothed body without risk of censure was to set the nudes within a context that was either classical or biblical: Eve and the serpent; Leda and the swan, so long as you can't actually see it going in. Mind you, that's not to say that there weren't always artists who were unafraid of censure, or that the church's standpoint on the issue was at all times and in all lands universally observed. The

flow of English literature since its Saxon beginnings would seem largely unconcerned with sexual propriety. A few of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are indistinguishable from the soft-core sex-romps that swamped English cinemas during the 1970s. *Carry On Up The Fourteenth Century. Confessions of a Pardon*. Shakespeare could work encrypted lavatorial filth into descriptions of a lady's handwriting: 'Her Cs, her Us 'N' her Ts, whereby she maketh her great Ps.' That said, it wasn't until William Caxton had devised his printing press... for younger readers, just think 15th century Internet... that a tradition of pornography as we would understand the term today was able to develop. Just as with the internet, the new technology was put almost immediately to the purpose of disseminating dirty pictures.

Prior to this point, when mass production first became a possibility, erotic culture had existed only in the private realm of artists and collectors, which in public terms is much the same as saying it did not exist at all. The church had never previously adopted a position on pornography, simply because there wasn't any, and was relatively slow to recognize it when it finally showed up. By William Blake's day in the last half of the eighteenth century, contemporary London was awash with fuck-books and salacious prints of all varieties, including such essential publications as a best-selling directory of whores that introduced the phrase 'as lewd as goats and monkeys' to the English language, meant apparently as a recommendation, as a Regency equivalent to Michelin's four stars.

It's also worth remembering the late 1700s as the era during which, in France, the Marquis Donatien Alphonse Francois de Sade began to use outrageous, violent, scatological and frequently intensely dull pornography for the first time as a blunt instrument for social satire, finding in society's great squeamishness about its carnal impulses a vulnerable underbelly that was open to attack.

Yet when the 19th century

began to seriously get underway, however, amidst European worries with regard to all the revolutions of the previous 50 years coupled with the uncertainty and paranoia typifying the Napoleonic Wars, a more repressive and authoritarian mood prevailed. While there were undeniably innumerable licentious chapbooks circulated all throughout this period, these were already starting to adopt the furtive underground associations, the hunched posture that would stigmatise and lame pornography for the next hundred years or so.

As for open involvement in erotic work by writers, artists or any creators of proven ability, the ground appears to have become a toxic wasteland, poisonous to the reputation and alive with career-pathogens. When William Blake expired in 1827, even though his willingness to embrace sexuality and a broad range of sexually unorthodox ideas was central to his whole philosophy, over-protective devotees persuaded his wife Catherine to purge his work of any overtly erotic art or writings. That Blake had a love and also a facility for pornographic images can still be seen in his surviving marginalia, with doodled youths gobbled by fleshy matrons, but his acolytes had evidently made their minds up that the poet-visionary they were in the process of constructing would be more angelic without genitalia. We can but imagine, wistfully, the masturbatory masterworks incinerated in Blake's bonfire of profanities... *The Red Dragon Does The Woman Clothed In The Sun...* and it's better that we don't torment ourselves with all the other glorious artists whose posthumous conflagrations, real porno for pyros, may have gone completely unrecorded.

With the guilty and embarrassed tone thus set for the impending reign of Queen Victoria, we find pornography in the condition that has by and large defined it ever since: a wretched ghetto with which no respected artist would desire to be associated, and which therefore rapidly becomes the province of those with no literary

or artistic leanings whatsoever. The once rich erotic landscape was effectively deserted by the genuinely talented. It turned eventually into a genre that not only had no standards but also appeared to think it had no need of them, although during Victorian times this total desertification was still some way off into the future, and the cultural libido was still showing healthy spurts of life from time to time.

Indeed, the façade of abstemious morality that came as part of the Victorian packaging appeared to reproduce hothouse conditions in the prurient imagination of the day. Pornography, exemplified by periodicals such as *The Pearl*, could flourish, albeit only as an underground subculture. This subterranean network, though, extended a considerable way beneath surface society, so that the semi-detached homesteads of Victorian suburbia were dangerously undermined. In those times, long before the advent of the adult video outlet, city businessmen returning homeward for a weekend with their spouse or partner would call in at some back-street establishment and pick up a gaslight equivalent: just as theatre predates cinema, so too did fully scored dramatic home pornography precede the skin-flick. Pornographic playlets could be purchased, ranging from two-person dramas through to full ensemble pieces if the neighbours were agreeable. These publications came with sheet-music, so that if one of the participants were musically inclined then he or she could sit at the piano and provide a vigorous accompaniment to whatever activity was taking place upon the hearth-rug or the horsehair sofa. Yes, I know it sounds ridiculous but I was told that by Malcolm McLaren and if you can't trust Malcolm McLaren then whom can you trust?

The powerful erotic undercurrent that existed in society behind closed doors, however, was in direct opposition to the era's outward stance on sexual matters, and increasingly pornography was openly deplored as an unpardonable affront to public virtue. One collector of erotica, with many scurrilous unpublished manuscripts by Swinburne, Wilde and other notables, had been warned by his lady wife that, on his death, she was intent upon incinerating the entire obscene collection. Cunningly, the gentleman in question got around this by persuading the British Museum to accept a 'private case' containing his salacious valuables, a trick he only managed to pull off by making the safekeeping of his titillating treasures a condition of the Museum also getting all his first editions of Cervantes.

In the middle 19th century, of course, photography became an option for pornographers, though this was a development that introduced a new (and later vastly controversial) element to the erotic, or at least to the moral debate concerning it: these images were not the fruit of an aroused imagination, but were actual people who had lives beyond the photographic cropping of the dirty postcard that contained them. Concern for the model's moral wellbeing would come to equal or surpass concern

for the impressionable members of the public who might be exposed to the material's depraving influence. Back in those early days, though, when a camera was a relatively rare possession, at least in comparison to the notepad and pencil that one needed for more low-tech smut, the dominant mode of pornography was literary, and saucy snapshots were at first a fairly rarefied minority concern.

The literary mainstream of under-the-counter reading matter during the Victorian period varied widely in palatability, as is to be expected in an outcast and despised field without quality control of any kind. A Sadean passion for deflowering or else for uncritically depicted rape intruded nastily into some narratives, possibly even into a majority, but it's important that we do not overlook the socially benevolent material that found its only outlet in this much-loathed form. Sexual etiquette and even to a certain extent sexual politics could not be mentioned or discussed within the confines of Victorian propriety, which meant that only in a field already banished far beyond those confines could such subjects safely be brought up. It's by no means unusual to find participants in some chapter-length orgy of the period suddenly declaring half-time during which they will discuss such issues as the gentleman's responsibility to make sure that his female partner has been fully satisfied by their exchange, or the importance of always acceding to the female partner's wishes even when deranged by passion. These were matters that could not be raised in *Home Hints* and were certainly not taught at school or by one's parents. It would seem that the only sexual education being circulated in the 19th century was within publications that were by their very definition deemed obscene.

To illustrate this practice we need look no further than the riotous career of local 19th-century atheist Member of Parliament Charles Bradlaugh, whose indignant statue stands pointing accusingly upon a traffic island on Abington Square here in Northampton. Amidst the stream of principled activities and often controversial incidents that marked the life of this confirmed Old Labour politician is a spell in which Bradlaugh was jailed, along with noted Match-Girl agitator and Theosophist, Miss Annie Besant, for the distribution of 'obscene material'. This turns out to have been advice on contraception, meant for women of the working classes at a time when getting on a third of them might reasonably expect to die in childbirth. Pretty racy stuff, as you can probably imagine.

This intense and largely indiscriminate repression marking the Victorian era, though it was not unopposed and though in many ways it may have even made the period's porno more inventively subversive, could be seen as having triumphed in the end. The victory was pyrrhic and short-lived, admittedly, with the excesses of the 20th century poised in the wings and just about to make their lurid entrance, but for those artists caught dabbling in erotic waters when the



Opposite *Pornocrates*, by Félicien Rops (1878): the spirit of pornography himself.

This page *Fragile Aubrey Beardsley*, the poster child for sexual expression in the arts during the Decadence.
Oscar Wilde, the marvelously gifted gay aesthete and writer of the late 19th century whose 'gross indecency' trial erupted into national scandal.
Homo erectus: the mighty Robert Crumb, portraying himself as a perpetually horny outcast with a big-butt fetish.





clampdown came, it must have still seemed a decisive one. While there were obviously a wide variety of complex incidents and issues influencing how affairs progressed around this time, the one event that is most emblematic of this sea-change in the public attitude towards erotica must surely be the trial of Oscar Wilde.

What makes Wilde's downfall so important is the way in which this marvellously gifted aesthete and writer had become a living symbol of the Decadence, the movement that perfumed practically all of the important art or literature composed between the 1870s and 1890s. The aesthetics of the movement, as defined by early decadent Theophile Gautier, demand that artists should be unafraid to plunder from the opulence of history or legend for their imagery, and equally feel free to borrow from the latest offerings of their culture—from its 'technical vocabularies.' Given that the remit of the Decadence was thus intentionally broad, it's hardly a surprise that the erotic should become a major element informing the whole atmosphere by which the movement was surrounded. For the first time in a century, genuine artists were again engaging openly and meaningfully with sexual expression in their work, and the exquisite peacock display that resulted must have seemed, in sexually color-blind Victorian eyes, like a red rag to a bull. Even the decorative border lines characterising Art Nouveau were heavy with the curve and sag of breasts or testicles, even upon those relatively rare occasions when there were no breasts or testicles depicted in the actual illustration.

Literature witnessed a plethora of stellar talents more than willing to apply themselves to the erotic, from the rich and sensual undertows found in the work of J.K. Huysmans to the full-blown pornographic writings of Guillaume Apollinaire or Pierre Louÿs. Louÿs presents an interesting case in that here was a writer blessed with independent means whose work received tremendous critical acclaim quite early on in his career, after *The Love Song of Bilitis* had been published, and yet who found literary fame repulsive and elected to write brilliantly demented hardcore filth for the remainder of his life, safe in the knowledge that it was unpublishable outside the small market in privately printed chapbooks for the connoisseur.

Poetry too was graced during this period with many sublime talents who possessed an ear for the erotic, notably the tragic Ernest Dowson. Dowson, killing himself with his fondness for the green destroyer, absinthe, and besotted with a 15-year-old girl, died much too young in relative obscurity after enriching English phraseology with such well-known expressions as 'I have been faithful to you, in my fashion', 'Days of wine and roses' and 'Gone with the wind.' Yes, that was Dowson.

Within visual media, however, and despite fierce competition from the likes of Alphonse Mucha, it is fragile Aubrey Beardsley who emerges as the poster child for sexual expression in the arts during

the Decadence. Dead by the age of 26 from galloping tuberculosis, Beardsley was in both his artistry and in his personal appearance a rare orchid who would not survive the bitter, disapproving moral blizzards of what William Blake had once referred to as 'the English Winter.' Although Beardsley's personal life appears much like Beardsley himself to be asexual (and despite the fact that save for scurrilous suggestions from Frank Harris of a sexual relationship with his beloved sister Mabel Beardsley, there's no evidence that Aubrey ever physically had intercourse with anyone) the artist's drawings are alive with sexuality. Perhaps, as with the virgin architect Antonio Gaudí, Beardsley's one real form of sexual expression is to be found in his sensual and yearning line.

In a career that spanned no more than eight years, Beardsley's striking style impressed itself upon the public's consciousness through illustrated works such as Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* or by means of Beardsley's elegant and sinister submissions to John Lane's *Yellow Book*. Although the artist's name became a byword for peculiarity... 'Awfully Weirdsley', as one wag rechristened him... the impact of his work with its tumescent dwarves and aching sexuality, was such that it established Beardsley and his swooping line as the defining spirit of the 1890s. The handful of images that he supplied for Wilde's *Salomé* are among his very best work, although at the same time these are the few illustrations that undoubtedly contributed the most to Beardsley's ruin.

When the Wilde trial finally erupted as a national scandal, nobody and nothing ever touched by Oscar's scented glove was safe. Whilst walking from his doorstep to the waiting coach that would deliver him to court, reporters noticed that Wilde held 'a yellow book' tucked underneath his arm. This was most likely J.K. Huysmans' classic *A Rebours*, of which the then-current edition sported a bright yellow cover, but unfortunately, in the mounting lynch-mob atmosphere the difference between the indefinite and the definite article was overlooked. 'A yellow book' became 'The Yellow Book', and in the backlash against Wilde, the single most important literary and artistic publication of the 1890s was stamped brutally out of existence.

Beardsley, having illustrated Wilde's *Salomé*, was inextricably connected with the jailed and banished Oscar in the public mind, and was assumed to be a homosexual. Ironically, the artist was not merely not a close friend or associate of Wilde's, but actively disliked him and would take pains to avoid the portly dandy if he saw him coming. From the viewpoint of the general public, though, this was irrelevant: to have adorned a work by Oscar Wilde was evidently just as bad as having been discovered in flagrante with the poet. Beardsley, horrified by these insinuations, ran into the home of an acquaintance one night, gaunt and haggard and unshaven. Staring through his red-rimmed haunted eyes into a looking glass, the artist asked of no one

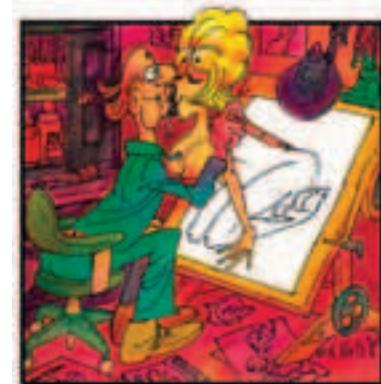


in particular if the face he was looking at could be that of a sodomite. Blacklisted by all decent publishers and with *The Yellow Book* now gone, Beardsley was suddenly deprived of both an income and an outlet for his art, while in the midst of an emotional turmoil and declining health. He coughs into his linen handkerchief and stares at the resultant scarlet spatter, poppies standing in the snow.

It is at this point that the cavalry arrives, too late to save the day but just in time for one last doomed, heroic rally: Leonard Smithers, former lawyer turned smut-publisher, one of the true unsung heroes of pornography. His valiant efforts, following the Wilde trial, to find work for Beardsley, Dowson and the rest resulted in his publication of a new decadent periodical called *The Savoy*, which succeeded and in many ways surpassed the much-missed *Yellow Book*. For Beardsley, though, while this reprieve from cultural exile was a welcome one, the damage to his confidence and self-esteem had already been done, and this would seem to have had repercussions on the artist's physical wellbeing, or, specifically, his lungs.

In 1898, with Beardsley on his deathbed, his last wishes were that Mabs, his sister Mabel, should take pains to 'destroy Lysistrata and all obscene works'. Subsequent publication of the Lysistrata illustrations and of Beardsley's uncompleted pornographic novel (a retelling of the legend of Venus and Tannhäuser he called *Under the Hill*) suggest that Mabel Beardsley showed considerably more reluctance to purge the erotic from her brother's work than Catherine Blake had shown regarding that of her late husband, and for this we should be grateful to her. Thanks to Mabel, several pieces of exquisite work survive that would not otherwise have done. It's still disheartening, however, to consider Aubrey Beardsley going to his grave unnecessarily ashamed of anything in the slim body of sublime and influential work he gave the world. Like Wilde or Ernest Dowson, Beardsley's work had only ever enriched human culture with its grace and beauty. Where, in that, was anything to be ashamed of?

The incoming moral weather, though, dictated otherwise. Around the juncture of nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the British Empire was at its uneasy peak, the largest empire that the world had ever known, with subsequently massive cultural influence across the globe, for better, or, more usually, for worse. Despite the bloated self-important arrogance that seemingly accompanies all empires when they're at the dizzy heights immediately preceding their historically inevitable downfall, Britain was approaching the new century with a whole nest of nagging insecurities: the British Empire was itself falling apart and would be done with the time that India gained independence during 1947.



opposite *Lysistrata Haranguing the Athenian Women* (1896) by Beardsley. The 26-year-old artist's dying wishes were that his sister should 'destroy Lysistrata and all obscene works'. Thankfully, she didn't.

this page A public mural from the Villa of the Centenary in Pompeii, circa 1 AD.

A self-portrait by Mad comics artist (and later, Playboy contributor) Harvey Kurtzman.



No one was entirely sure what changes the new century would bring, and no doubt when it came to decadence within the arts, numerous labored parallels with Ancient Rome were drawn. For whatever reason, the new liberalism in the art and writings of the Decadents was seen as symptomatic of a moral blight, an indicator of decline. Thus, with a fierceness born of fear, the Empire struck back through the Wilde trial and its frightened, cowering aftermath, imposing what amounted to a new Puritanism that would have its impact right across the Western world.

In Germany, as an example, the desire to curb and regulate sexual expression took on trappings that, perhaps predictably, were pseudo-scientific. As with K.M. Benkert, who first minted the term 'homosexuality' as an expression to be used by doctors or pathologists, so almost any form of socially unseemly sexuality (which is to say practically all of it) was seen as a disease that might one day be cured by science. An ingenious array of 'medical' devices was produced, for instance, to protect the vulnerable youngster from unwelcome incidents of bodily arousal such as those, say, which occur to adolescent boys when they're asleep. While the boy's hands would obviously be strapped securely to the headboard to prevent deliberate acts of masturbation, this did not prevent him from becoming sexually aroused while sleeping, possibly while dreaming, which was clearly a quite unacceptable state of affairs in century's-end Germany. To solve this problem somebody devised a ring with sharp spikes set around the inside surface, that could be placed comfortably around a detumescent penis but which would impale it if the organ happened to expand for any reason. Very popular with parents of small boys in early twentieth century Germany and Austria, apparently, this form of Sadeian sexual torture during childhood would produce the famously well-balanced gen-

eration of young Übermenschen that counted noted sexual deviant Adolf Hitler in its ranks.

Just to recap, then, sexually progressive cultures gave us mathematics, literature, philosophy, civilization and the rest, while sexually restrictive cultures gave us the Dark Ages and the Holocaust. Not that I'm trying to load my argument, of course.

While this wave of repression had its victims, it could not prevent the 20th century from happening, nor bring with it new technologies that would inevitably change all aspects of our lives, including our pornography. Film had arrived in the late 1800s, giving birth immediately to the first pornographic stag reels, but as with the camera that had come before, the sheer expense of the equipment necessary to produce a halfway-competent blue movie made such efforts a minority affair. It was instead from the developments that had been made in William Caxton's print technology that the next surge of sexually explicit life would come. Newer and cheaper modes of printing such as mimeograph were coming into play, which meant that publishing would soon become a much more democratic process and was no longer solely the province of the wealthy and the cultured.

In the 1930s came the boom in what was known as 'mushroom' publishing in Britain, an equivalent to the much larger pulp explosion that was happening in the U.S.A. Although both countries had their rudimentary laws on obscenity in place by this time, in both cases the laws were so ill-defined as to allow a great deal of room for interpretation. Raciness was tolerated up to soft-core levels, although in such foggy-delineated territory it was easy to cross over lines unwittingly and find yourself the focus of a moral panic, such as happened with the 'spicy' pulps that came out on that side of the Atlantic, or with the 'Hank Janssen' novels published over here. The public's thirst for pornographic fare was evidently undiminished, but by brute over-reaction and a zero-tolerance policy (such as the prosecution that saw British saucy seaside postcard veteran Donald McGill convicted for his smutty innuendoes), the authorities could just about hold down the tin lid on their quaking, seething pressure-cooker.

This is not to say there weren't steamy escapes from time to time. The subterranean world of hardcore pornographic publishing had weathered all the ups and downs of the new century, remaining more or less untouched by virtue of its near-invisibility. Other than a smattering of reprints from the previous century and intermittent bursts of low-grade new material, however, there's not much to recommend the porno output of the 1930s save for the phenomenon of eight-page pamphlets churned out in America during this period and known as 'Tijuana Bibles', possibly because it was assumed that sex and anything associated with it started out in Tijuana.

The eight-pagers, crude material crudely produced, are nonetheless a fascinating way-stage in the evolution of both comics and

erotica. Though various apocryphal accounts exist of how these books came into being, the most winning and endearing version is the one in which three ladies clandestinely form a partnership to supplement their incomes, with one woman handling the writing, one the drawing, and the third one handling the business/distribution end of the arrangement. Whether this is true or not, the fact remains that in the Tijuana Bibles we can see a socially mischievous spark that would in time provide the basis for a whole American tradition of first-rate inflammatory satire told in comic form.

The best-remembered of the Tijuana Bibles were the ones which featured well-known characters from daily comic strips, shakily rendered in what were still fair approximations of the styles used by the artists who had worked on the originals. The great appeal of showing thoroughly non-sexual figures such as Blondie, Jiggs or Popeye taking part in pornographic skits lies in the greater contrast, with the sexual content seeming dirtier when in the context of some previously spotless cultural icon. There is also the subversive pleasure that is to be had in puncturing the anodyne and sexless vision of society presented by the Sunday funnies, and it seems entirely likely that when Harvey Kurtzman drafted up the blueprint for his seminal *Mad* comic in the 1950s, the eight-pagers were an influential part of the satiric mix. Kurtzman's attack on *Archie* (which reputedly ensured punitive treatment of the E.C. comics line by a Draconian comics code authority presided over by the *Archie Comics* publishers) presented the allegedly 'typical teenager' as a High School protection racketeer, with Betty and Veronica as reefer-smoking jailbait; it was a portrayal that could quite easily have stepped out of an eight-pager, albeit an eight-pager where the flow of sexuality was now only an undercurrent and where the immensely talented Bill Elder did a far superior job of reproducing and subverting the whole *Archie* style than had the gifted Tijuana amateurs preceding him.

Beside a cast of characters culled from newspaper comic strips, the Tijuana Bible pamphlets also utilised contemporary actresses and actors like Mae West and Laurel & Hardy as their featured players. Interestingly, the 1930s criminal celebrity such as Baby-Face Nelson or John Dillinger had his own sub-genre, playing to the public's obvious affection for a glamorous crook and also to the aura of near-mythic sexual potency with which such figures were surrounded in the popular imagination. In this combination of a wildly anti-social hero figure with the visceral rush of unbridled pornography, the Tijuana Bibles were prefiguring the comics underground that would erupt, primarily from San Francisco, in another thirty years or so.

Back in the early-middle 20th century, however, the erotic urges in society were finding their most lively manners of expression in burlesque theatre and, a little later, in the 'nudie-cutie' movies that burlesque had played its part in

giving birth to. Through the 1950s and the 1960s, maverick directors like Russ Meyer almost managed to provide a voice for the unconscious dream-life of America, its libidinous impulses stirred into a demented slapstick of violence and sex that was at once exuberant and infantile, marked by a kind of innocence, at least compared with all the joyless, dead-eyed fare served up for us today. Justly described as a 'rural Fellini', Meyer seems to have had a specific private goddess-image that was given generous flesh in his iconic women like Tura Satana or Kitten Natividad. Just as with Robert Crumb a decade later, Meyer's enshrining of one female body-type appears to hark back to the primal origins of the erotic, to Bog Venus with a shiny leather makeover and captured not in stone but celluloid.

In 1950s culture powerful sexual undertows were evident, sprung up in opposition to the stifling and sexless Eisenhower/McMillan ethos of the times. Writers like Hubert Selby, Jr. and Henry Miller, who'd produced work in the 1930s and the 1940s that was banned on publication were beginning to find an appreciative new audience and sometimes even foreign publishers, like the Olympia Press as founded by Maurice Girodias. Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* was attempting to establish soft-core porn as an upmarket lifestyle statement, and a new wave of 'sick' comedy was coming into being that would find its apogee in the uncensored and occasionally brilliant rants of Lenny Bruce. Meanwhile, in Harvey Kurtzman's *Mad* there was a sharp new synthesis of hip and Jewish humor that took sexual references as a standard part of its comedic repertoire, as in the Kurtzman parody of Julius Caesar where a centurion crying "Someone's coming!" is answered by a word balloon from somewhere out of panel reading "Ooh, I'm dying!" Elsewhere new and exciting music spilled out of the radios, black-influenced and sexual with its label 'Rock and Roll' simply another euphemism for the sexual act, as 'Jazz' itself had been. And most importantly of all, in San Francisco, 1955, the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti started publishing as City Lights Books in North Beach, the city's famously bohemian Italian quarter that had previously been inhabited by anti-Mussolini anarchists.

Having heard the young New York poet Allen Ginsberg's first public performance of his William Blake-inspired work *Howl* at the Six Gallery in 1955, the impressed Ferlinghetti published it through City Lights Books in November 1956. Despite the minimal attention that the book at first received...hardly surprising for a first work by an unknown author in the pretty much neglected field of poetry...by the June of 1957 a police raid carried out on City Lights Books and a subsequent trial for obscenity pushed *Howl* and *Other Poems* to the forefront of the nation's consciousness. Judge Clayton Horn, surprisingly, ruled that a work could not be deemed obscene if it possessed "the slightest redeeming social significance".

Judge Horn's decision meant

With each new technological advance, pornography has both proliferated and degraded in its quality. Today, porn is everywhere but nowhere is it art.





that City Lights could put out *Howl* and many other controversial pieces without fear of damaging reprisals from those in authority. Although some writings were still too extreme to publish for a year or two, such as the first ten chapters of *The Naked Lunch* by William Burroughs that had been turned down by the Chicago Literary Revue, the ruling meant that the Beat writers could now crystallise round Ferlinghetti's premises at 261 Columbus Avenue and spark off what is possibly the most exciting literary movement of the twentieth century. It also meant that an important legal precedent had been established, granting sexual material immunity from prosecution if it could be shown as socially significant or of artistic merit.

This was the defence successfully adopted some years later in the widely celebrated English court case over D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, during which the prosecuting counsel summarized a still-prevailing attitude towards pornography when he suggested that no decent person would allow their 'wives or servants' to read such a work. This one remark, betraying as it did a ludicrously antiquated and Victorian view of social matters, almost certainly convinced the jury to vote on the side of the defence. The point of view behind the prosecution's statement is that while 'we', being white males of a certain age and social standing, are far too evolved to be depraved by such material, its probable effects upon those morally more feeble than ourselves (such as the young, the working classes, foreigners or women) would be ruinous.

While as a work of modern beatnik poetry *Howl* could be safely overlooked by the majority of average citizens, the *Lady Chatterley* trial meant that most homes in the western world would come to own a much-thumbed copy of what is in fact a relatively minor work from D.H. Lawrence. Sexual subject matter, in the public's eye, had become normalized, which would open the floodgates to the rush of sexually suggestive or explicit television programs, movies, books and pop-song lyrics that would help define the 1960s, although obviously such progress did not go entirely unopposed. Books were still banned, films were still censored, and at one of London's practically-unheard-of exhibitions of erotic art during the '60s, doodles by John Lennon were seized by police, along with several Lysistrata prints by poor old Aubrey Beardsley who'd been dead 70 years by then. Organizations such as the Viewers and Listeners Association headed by self-publicizing, self-appointed moral guardian Mary Whitehouse would put pressure on the BBC to tone down certain television shows or to remove Scott Walker's version of the Jacques Brel classic *Jackie* from the radio play-lists lest its references to 'authentic queers and phoney virgins' should corrupt the young.

The running battle faced by sexual expression during the 'permissive' 'sixties' is an indication of how deeply feelings ran upon the issue. Evidently, the same social squeamishness regarding sex that

the Marquis De Sade had made his target back in revolutionary France was still a soft spot that those wishing to critique society could do far worse than to attack. The Hippy movement, welling up in the mid-sixties around various reference points including Aubrey Beardsley's art nouveau extravagances, William Blake and Allen Ginsberg's howled response to Blake, was quick to seize on sexual rebellion as a favorite mode of confrontation.

This is not to infer that a font of functional hippy-porn did not spring up. It did, although its manifestations were often subterranean to a degree that caused nary a ripple on the surface of public consciousness. *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts* represented Ed Sanders' "total assault on culture," something he would later take musical with the Fugs, whose calls for group gropes of every description were greeted with jubilation. Leonore Kandel's *Love Book*, a slim volume of erotic poetry, inexplicably prosecuted in San Francisco, seemed almost the last gasp of the new puritans, although they continued to issue intermittent squeaks (before re-emerging with a roar). By the time Essex House began to issue true hippy porn—David Meltzer's *Agency* trilogy, Charles Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*, Philip Jose Farmer's *Image of the Beast*—the entire concept of porn-as-writing seemed to be a dead letter. This was largely due to the efforts of Barney Rosset and Grove Press at redefining the boundaries of acceptable literature. They went to trial on *Chatterley*, *Tropic Of Cancer* and *Naked Lunch*, winning each case and pushing the frontiers a little further each time. But, indeed, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Nowhere is this counter-cultural assault on sexual conformity better exemplified than in the early comic strips of the extraordinary Robert Crumb, whose pioneering efforts in the underground press turned out work that would prove seminal in every sense. Using a reassuringly familiar and therefore highly subversive style, Crumb gleefully submerged himself in the most flagged-off and restricted waters of the mass unconscious, serving up a vision of America as seen through sexually obsessive eyes, peopled by Snoids and nubile Yetis, with its most forbidden Joe Blow urges dragged out from behind suburbia's concealing drapes, set down in black and white for everyone to see. That Crumb's work was received enthusiastically across the social spectrum would suggest that after the initial shock had worn off, many people found it was a vision that they recognised. They knew, in the contemporary phrase, where Crumb was coming from.

While there were obvious precursors for the underground cartoon explosion in *Mad* comics, in the Tijuana Bibles, and the fanzine press that Crumb had been a part of, it was Crumb who set the bar for the cartoonists who would follow him with the release of *Zap #1*, peddled from a baby carriage by the artist up and down the freak-encrusted length of Haight Street. Just as with the Sex Pistols almost a decade later, Crumb's work was



the catalyst that launched the equally extreme careers of those who followed him. Crumb's work in *Zap*, along with that of gifted cronies such as S. Clay Wilson, Spain or Robert Williams, plus the many undergrounds that *Zap* inspired, would turn out to be a high tide line in pornography, created cheerfully with an intent that was both social and artistic. (The brilliant underground cartoonist Sharon Rudahl, using the nom de plume Mary Sativa, wrote *The Acid Temple Ball*, a remarkable novel—published as part of the Olympia Press's "Traveller's Companion" series—that lovingly recounted a woman's sexual experiences while under different combinations of illicit substances.) When the comics undergrounds at last gave up the ghost in the late 1970s, there would be nothing of real energy or spirit that would rise to take their place. Crumb soldiered valiantly on in *Weirdo* and in other publications, but although his work remained as marvellous as ever (and, in fact, continued to improve and to progress), there was the sense now of a solitary maestro labouring in isolation, rather than that of a figurehead with a whole socio-artistic movement surging up behind him.

By and large, what happened in the 1970s was that the hard-won sexual freedoms of the previous decades, fought for on grounds of ideology, became, predictably, a booming market ripe for exploitation. Obviously encouraged by the growth of sexual expression in the arts during the '60s, movie-makers in the '70s decided that the lowly porn film could be wrapped in bigger budgets and improved production values. It could be rebranded, dressed up in a way that would suggest artistic merit, and by this means could become for the first time mass-market cinema. In offerings such as *The Devil in*

Just to recap, then, sexually progressive cultures gave us literature, philosophy, civilization and the rest, while sexually restrictive cultures gave us the Dark Ages and the Holocaust. Not that I'm trying to load my argument, of course



Miss Jones, The Opening of Misty Beethoven, Behind the Green Door and a scattering of others, porn directors tried with varying degrees of success to transcend the trashy, dopey limitations of their chosen genre. Smoother camera work and more imaginative sets combined with vestiges of genuine acting talent and at least some semblance of a screenplay to create works that appeared artistic, although only when compared to all the drooling halfwit porn films that had come before.

Even so, the public seemed to like the new availability of porno in the mainstream and responded with enough enthusiasm to allow such movies to proliferate...right up until the point where the real age of Traci Lords came out. Defenses of artistic or social significance were useless when confronted by an actual statutory offence, and with this chink in porno's arty armor opened up by the authorities the industry seems to have beaten an immediate retreat, with the big-budget porn flick rapidly consigned to history.

Of course, by then the 1980s were just round the corner and the porno movie would be rescued by the massive rise of the home video market, but its emphasis and its agenda would be changed accordingly. Whereas the improved production values of the 1970s had been designed to draw in a cross-over mainstream audience to the cinemas, home video viewers were identified, perhaps in part correctly, as a captive and addicted market-base that was entirely undiscriminating in its viewing habits. Subtly yet importantly, the audience's view of itself also changed. While sitting in a crowded cinema watching pornography amongst a hundred other normal individuals or couples could conceivably be quite a liberating communal experience and an indicator of one's liberal tolerance and sophistication, watching a porn movie all alone behind closed shutters is a very different matter and invokes a different mindset. The experience is generally furtive, secretive, ashamed. While it might be acceptable to mention at the office the next day that you'd been to the cinema the night before and watched *Deep Throat*, purely to see what all the fuss was over, naturally, you might think twice before regaling colleagues with the news that you'd stayed home and masturbated over *Anal Virgins IV*.

Pornography, although more massively distributed than it had ever previously been, was now re-

duced to a mass market without any standards or criteria, rapidly accumulating an attendant atmosphere of sordidness and shame. Still, just so long as pornographic culture could be kept indoors, a private and addictive and increasingly expensive vice, it remained a very lucrative commodity. As noted earlier, sexual fantasy is something that is free to anyone still in possession of a sexual imagination, but the pornographic video or DVD sells us a lifeless and lacklustre substitute for something we could have created much more satisfyingly ourselves. This, in the eyes of the authorities, must be the perfect situation for pornography: make it available, so that those massive revenues and taxes can start rolling in, but keep it frowned upon and shameful so that you don't get an Allen Ginsberg turning up and claiming that it's art, it's civil liberties, a movement, politics, anything that sounds dangerous.

Of course, both sex and sexual expression are political and always have been, but it wasn't until the late 1960s and the 1970s that they were widely seen as such. Sprung up from the same '60s counter-culture that had given rise to Robert Crumb came feminism to provide the artist with his fiercest critics. Feminists took the position on pornography that it exploited and degraded women, which was certainly an argument that it was difficult to disagree with in the light of much of the material that was available around that time. If it had remained just that, an argument put forward as an element in a continuing debate, then it might not have polarized the liberal community to the degree that it unquestionably came to do. Instead of putting ideas forward as a proposition, feminism at the time delivered them as dictums from the moral high ground. And instead of properly considering the issues raised by feminism, liberal men perceived themselves as victims of an unprovoked attack upon their sexuality, responding angrily. Feminist protestors against porn would find themselves uneasy bedfellows with right-wing Christian campaigners, and would also find themselves on the receiving end of an equivalent amount of left-wing ire, some of it justified and some of it unfair.

For one thing, it's important to distinguish between the objections of the chanting feminists and those of placard-waving Christians, even when they're part of the same picket line outside an adult video hire emporium. Feminist arguments, even those one may not agree with, are at least constructed on the principles of logic and therefore can be debated, having precepts that are falsifiable, that can be proven or disproved. Religious arguments against pornography, alternately, are based upon the idea of a disapproving super-being, proof of whose existence has thus far eluded us. This is not to say that God does not exist, nor that religious people aren't entitled to their point of view, but is simply intended to point out that ideas predicated upon a specific deity's existence are not rational ideas, and therefore have no place in rational discussion. I'm sorry, I

don't make the rules. That's just the way it is, and we'd have to entirely change the meaning of the English language before we could make it otherwise.

Despite the rational basis of the feminist agenda, though, it had been served up, understandably, as confrontation, and high feelings on both sides meant that a sensible debate would never really be a possibility. The already-fragmented left became divided upon grounds of gender with both camps in their entrenched and stalemated positions, men insisting that the issue was completely one of civil liberties, women insisting it was one of sexual politics. Both sides were right, of course, but by then were not speaking to each other so that the debate remained in deadlock.

Attitudes towards pornography had not just brought about a schism in the liberal ranks, though, but had pretty much split feminism itself down the middle. Many women and some men who still believed that women had a way to go before social equality was reached became reluctant to describe themselves as feminists because of the censorious and illiberal connotations that the term had taken on. Rejecting feminism's dogma on pornography, some women made an effort to reclaim the genre in pro-sexual publications such as *On Our Backs*, its title borrowed impishly from hard-line feminist mag *Off Our Backs*. Elsewhere were the first stirrings of the erstwhile network that would later call itself Feminists Against Censorship.

Although it would eventually be these dissenting female voices who'd suggest a possible solution to the unproductive stand-off on the issue of pornography, during the mid-'90s the arrival of the internet would mean that, once more, any ethical debate upon the subject would be swept to one side, overtaken by events and by the socially transforming onslaught of technology. Just as home video had meant that porno could be privately enjoyed by a much greater segment of the population, the arrival of the internet took all that one stage further. Whereas hiring videos or DVDs might still entail the risk of being caught by an acquaintance scuttling furtively out of a rental outlet, or of having one's porn-stash discovered by a disapproving spouse, the internet apparently removed that final hurdle. It became clear that a large majority of people weren't as frightened of pornography as they were scared of being found out.

England, in the 1970s, was racked by strikes which culminated in a national three-day week while shops and businesses were closed by power failures. If the blackouts happened unexpectedly, then stores and supermarkets found that there were sudden bursts of opportunist shop-lifting. Even at the upmarket retail chains like Marks & Spencer, managers discovered that their prim, predominantly middle-class customers weren't averse to slipping some expensive item deep within their twin-set when the lights were out. Public morality must obviously be seen to be observed in order to retain one's

opposite
Lysistrata Defending the Acropolis (1896)
by Beardsley. Lysistrata, the lead character in the comic play of the same name by Aristophanes, persuades the women of warring states to occupy public buildings (like the Acropolis) and withhold sex from their husbands until they agree to end their war.

this page
Cinesias Soliciting Myrrhina (1896) by Beardsley.

The Marquis de Sade, as visualized by Man Ray.

J.K. Huysmans, author of the Decadent classic *A Rebours*.

A sculpted marble figure of the Greek god Pan at play.



social standing, but when no one can see anything at all then it's a different matter.

So it was with the arrival of the Internet: in cyberspace, no one can hear you climax. Since reputedly the greater part of all the traffic on this information super-highway is devoted to the viewing or downloading of pornography, we must assume that the demand for porn is almost universal. Perusing smut would seem to be no longer an activity confined to isolated sexual deviants, but more a pastime human beings simply enjoy when left to their own devices. Also it would seem as if commercial porno has become the undiscussed wallpaper of contemporary society; it is so ubiquitous that it's accepted without question as a fact of life.

Pornography, or what would only recently have been referred to as pornography, is now a part of mainstream culture. Having sexual undertones or even overtones since its inception, pop music during the 1980s first began to consciously adopt overtly pornographic stances with a repertoire of pornographic imagery and reference employed by artists such as Prince, Madonna, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and a parade of others. Where Chuck Berry had been banned for serving up single-entendres on the subject of his ding-a-ling, and Lou Reed got away with Candy Darling giving head in his Walk on the Wild Side solely because British censors didn't understand the term, the Spice Girls now convey their need to Zig-a-zig-ahh to an audience of ten-year-old girls with complete impunity.

Properly packaged as a taxable commodity, erotic imagery pervades our culture to an extent that would have been previously unimaginable. While pornography employed by individuals for their personal pleasure as an aid to masturbation is still seen as something vaguely shameful, its use in a corporate context, as a means of selling us consumer goods, is smiled on. Advertisers fill our television screens and billboards with it, trying to associate their snack-food, car or line of sweaters with arousal so that they can shift more units. Rock and Pop and Rap promoters drape their artist's videos and lyrics in it without comment, so that in a climate of increased concern and indeed mounting panic over paedophilia it's perfectly okay for Britney Spears to posture in a fetishistic schoolgirl outfit of a type that cannot actually have been worn by a schoolgirl any time this century. The word 'fuck', once inflammatory when on the lips of Allen Ginsberg, Lenny Bruce or Kenneth Tynan, can be cutely scrambled as the logo for the French Connection clothing line's United Kingdom franchise. The big difference between our commercial porno-culture and traditional pornography, however, is that while the former is more limited and soft-core than the latter, it's no longer something sought out by an eager and consenting individual but instead is a feature of society that there is no avoiding, there whether we like it or not. As a culture, we are more intensely sexualised and stimulated than we've ever been before, and from the rising rate of sex crime it appears that we're not dealing with it very well.

Is this because, as Christian moralists and even some unreconstructed feminists might still suggest, pornography corrupts the moral fiber of its victims to the point where fantasies spill over into actual rape or sexual abuse? Probably not, if one considers for a moment just how many people are exposed to pornographic imagery at some point in their lives, and just how tiny a percentage of those people ever have recourse to rape or other sexual crimes. While serial murderers and rapists like Ted Bundy might claim on the eve of execution that it was pornography that gave them the idea for all their crimes and misdemeanors, this ignores the fact that for each psychopath who makes this claim there are a hundred thousand normal people who appear to never have been pushed over the edge into monstrosity by anything they watched or read. Besides, I've personally yet to find a pornographic work that features anyone removing all their car's interior door-handles, or dressing in a plaster-cast to lull their prey into a false sense of security. Perhaps it's a niche market that I've yet to come across, or possibly those ideas came out of the perpetrator's own psychopathology, not from pornography at all.

Should we decide, then, that there's no connection between the eroticism saturating western culture and the rising tide of sex crime in that culture? Probably, once more, we shouldn't, although the connection may not be as simple and direct as we're expecting. It's instructive to consider different countries in the light of their reaction to pornography, where it appears as if the problem might not be in our pornography itself so much as in the way we view pornography as a society. In Denmark, Spain and Holland it is possible to find hardcore pornography displayed in almost every family newsagent, such fare having become so commonplace that it is barely noticed. With pornography accepted as a fact of life, the attached sense of shame and guilt we find in the United States and Britain is conspicuously absent. Also notable in the porn-tolerant cultures mentioned up above is the low rate of sex crime, relative to the U.K. and U.S.A., that these cultures

enjoy, almost as if within such cultures porno is able to function as a social safety valve in a way that English/American society does not allow. Given that the internet is global, it's not that these places have less or more porn than we do, nor that they're less sexualized by general culture than ourselves. Could it be, simply, that like Palaeolithic fetish-worshippers or Ancient Greeks, they treat it differently and are affected by it differently in turn?

Consider how we treat pornography, on either side of the Atlantic: living in cultures that have been deliberately sexualized for purposes of commerce, it is not unlikely that some of the population will find themselves over-stimulated and will seek release from this condition, usually by resorting to whatever form of porno is most readily available. Unfortunately, in societies that have followed the early church's lead by letting people view pornography on the sole understanding that to do so is a sin, such a release will be accompanied almost immediately by a reflex reaction of guilt, shame, embarrassment and maybe even actual self-disgust.

To understand how this conflicted situation could conceivably affect an individual's hard-wiring, let's imagine one of B.F. Skinner's rat experiments, albeit one that's even more perverse than usual. In our new experiment, the rat is given first his stimulus by means of, say, that schoolgirl promo-piece by Britney Spears we mentioned earlier. Stimulated thus, our rodent is conditioned to respond by pressing on the porno-lever to achieve the requisite reward of sexual release. Once this reward has been acquired, however, our rat will receive a strong electric shock of shame. Reward and punishment, therefore, become perversely linked. The only route to pleasure involves pain, humiliation. Would this treatment, carried out millions of times across whole rodent populations, have a beneficial or a deleterious effect upon their mental health, do you suppose?

With human beings, in the socially constructed Skinner Boxes of our sexuality, it isn't going too far to suggest that certain individuals are thus deprived of the release they seek, unable to accept the shame and loathing by which it's accompanied. Extended over an entire society, this means the pressure cooker lid is kept securely on, while the release-valve isn't functioning the way it does in Holland, Spain or Denmark. Subsequently we are subject to more frequent and disastrous explosions of the sex drive, ugly eruptions into real life by what should have been a harmless fantasy. The outcast status of pornography appears to drive some people into shadowy and claustrophobic isolation where their sexual daydreams can turn into something dark and dangerous that is to nobody's advantage, neither themselves, their victims, nor society at large. Worse still, in sexually restrictive cultures where pornography is seen as causing sexual crime (rather than as providing an escape-valve that might possibly prevent it) the instinctual response is almost certainly a fresh attempt to bear down on the pressure cooker's lid.

Where does this leave us, and where does it leave pornography? With each new technological advance since William Caxton it would seem pornography has both proliferated and degraded in its quality. Today's society, thanks to the internet and other factors, is entirely saturated with erotica of the most basic, rudimentary kind; convict pornography for convict populations shuffling through life's mess-hall, without any other options than the slop they're given. Porn is everywhere, just as it was in ancient Greece, but nowhere is it art. Nowhere is it an affirmation of common humanity the way it was in classic culture but instead affirms only our alienation and our distance from each other, and despite its mass availability does not appear to be making us any happier.

Rather than functioning as a release for our quite ordinary sexual imaginings, porn functions as another social tether, as control-leash, lure and lash combined in one, a cattle-prod that looks just like a carrot. Dangling temptingly before us everywhere we look it leads us on. Then, in the guilty aftermath of our indulgences, it converts handily into a rod of shame with which to flog ourselves.

This is especially true of the United States as it negotiates its current Georgian era, although as with the unreasonable influence Victorian England had upon the world back in the nineteenth century, the repercussions of a faith-based presidency in America are felt across the globe. They're felt in terms of their effect on foreign policy, on the sciences and arts, and on how we think about our sexuality and its entitlements. Soaking in cyber-porn and promo-porn, the sexual heat within society is higher than it's ever been, the needle on the boiler's dial tipping alarmingly into the red, yet at this point in history we're governed by a mindset that is programmed to respond by clamping down on the escape valve, on pornography. Wipe out pornography, the idea seems to be, and we'll have also somehow wiped out all the urges that first prompted us to sculpt Bog Venus in the first place.

Clearly, the eradication of pornography is never going to happen. Porn's been with us since our Palaeolithic past and will in every likelihood be with us until we succeed in tidying

our species from the planet. 'No porn', then, is not a realistic option. I suggest the only choice we genuinely have is between good pornography and bad pornography. This obviously begs a bunch of questions, the first being as to how we differentiate between the two. Just for the purposes of argument let us define 'good' porn, like good Judge Clayton Horn, as that which is of noticeable social benefit, with 'bad' porn as its opposite, that which is noticeably to our social detriment. Of course, this raises a much bigger question, namely, does 'good' porn even exist? If not, could it conceivably exist at some point in the future, and what would it look like if it did?

To answer this, we could do far worse than refer back to those few dissenting female voices that were raised, back when the feminist debate upon pornography was at its hottest and perhaps its most intelligent. Taking some inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's influential essay *Must We Burn Sade?*, the wonderful and greatly-missed Angela Carter muses on porn in her book *The Sadeian Women*, finally suggesting that there might be some form of pornography yet undiscovered, glorious and liberating, unencumbered by the inequalities of sex and sexuality that dogged it in the past. Even porn's most uncompromising and vociferous feminist critic, Andrea Dworkin, has conceded that benign pornography might be conceivable, even if she considered such a thing highly unlikely. Given that we don't want 'bad pornography' and can't have 'no pornography', it's in this mere suggestion of the possibility of 'good' pornography that the one ray of light in an intractable debate resides.

The question still remains, however, as to how pornography might have a beneficial influence upon society, exactly? If we can't imagine such a situation, then how would we recognise it if it should arise? Even if we accept along with Andrea Dworkin, Angela Carter, Kathy Acker and Simone de Beauvoir that our hypothetical 'good' porn is possible, that doesn't help us much unless we have a clear idea of just what good, what benefit, pornography of the right kind might work within our culture.

We've observed already that in places such as Denmark, Spain or Holland porn appears to act to some extent as a release valve, venting sexual pressures harmlessly before they can explode in sex crime or abuse. We also noted that this doesn't seem to work in more restrictive cultures where reflexive guilt and shame seem to attend the very notion of pornography. What if it were possible to bring such a degree of artistry to our pornography that this immediate link between erotica and dire social embarrassment was severed? Might pornography in this way be allowed to function as it does in more enlightened climes, reducing our appalling score of actual men and women scarred and violated, actual children raped and killed and dumped in a canal? Isn't such a thing at least worth the attempt?

Pornography, if it could be expressed artistically in such a way, might welcome our sexual imagination in from the cold, into the reassuring warmth of socio-political acceptability. The power of art is that it lets us see, in someone else's work, an idea that we dimly formed but lacked the skill to realize or convey, and in this way makes us feel less alone. Pornography as we conceive of it today, however, does the opposite. It isn't art, cannot be openly admired or discussed, serves only to convince us of our isolation, to increase our sense that we are in our secret and most intimate desires alone save for the reeking company of other sweaty, masturbating perverts and social inadequates.

If we could redefine erotica, restore it to the venerated place in art that it was once accustomed to, this might defuse a number of our personal and social tensions with regard to sex in much the way it seems to have done at the dawn of western civilization. Realized properly, pornography could offer us a safe arena in which to discuss or air ideas that otherwise would go unspoken and could only stale and fester in our individual dark. Our sexual imagination is and always has been central to our lives, as individuals or as a species, and our culture might be much enriched, or at least more relaxed, if it acknowledged this. There'd be no more divine pornography by any future William Blake incinerated after his demise, no future Aubrey Beardsley on his deathbed, frightened, coughing for his finest work to be destroyed. No frilly decadent or bearded Beat compelled either to cover behind a pseudonym or add to the prolific oeuvre of 'Anonymous'.

Ennobled thus, pornography could take its place once more as a revered and almost sacred totem in society, could be brought full circle to its origins in the pneumatic pinhead babe of Willendorf. It seems we only have two choices in the way that we regard our own erotic dreams: either we can accept them and restore Bog Venus to her natural and proper place in culture; or we can reject them and attempt to stigmatize them, can attack arousal to so much conditioned shame and guilt and pain that in effect we have contained our sexuality within a spiky 19th century German cock-ring.

In the end, it's in the hands of individual people, individual



TAILS FROM THE LAND OF GENITALIA.



left
Covers of three Tijuana Bibles—shakily rendered 8-page pamphlets that featured pop culture figures engaging in, um, uncharacteristic activities.

vExamination of the
Herald (1896) by
Beardsley. 'Nuff said.

Profile of the so-called Venus of Willendorf: the original big-buttfetish woman.

Actress Kitten Natividad, sometime companion of bust-obsessed filmmaker Russ Meyer.

Author Angela Carter suggested that there might be some form of pornography yet undiscovered, glorious and liberating, unencumbered by the inequalities of sex and sexuality that dogged it in the past.



artists, writers, filmmakers or poets. If they have the nerve to plant their flags in this despised and dangerous terrain despite its uninviting nature, then in time the dismal wilderness might be transformed into a scented garden of enduring value. The erotic might be elevated from her current status as a hooker everyone keeps chained up in their cellar but nobody talks about, unmentionable but available, back to her previous position as a goddess.

We might find she's changed some since her chunky limestone origins, might find she now resembles something more along the lines depicted in *Pornocrates* by the magnificent Félicien Rops. This superb work, begun by Rops in the late 1870s, depicts the spirit of pornography herself, a gorgeous woman seen in profile treading carefully from right to left across the image, clad in only boots, gloves, stockings, jewellery and a drifting sash, topped by a Gainsborough hat. Pale flowers are in her hair, and, similarly pale, there is a blindfold tied across her eyes. Held on a ribbon-decorated leash as though it were a well-clipped poodle is a lean young pig that seems to lead the sightless beauty in the manner of a guide-dog. At a pace sedate and dignified, it navigates for its blind mistress what may be only a decorative lower border to the picture but which looks like the embellished stonework of a wall or ledge, along the top of which the elegant embodied spirit of Victorian pornography is guided by a snuffling hog; a swine before The Pearl.

A frieze runs in relief along the wall or border's topmost edge, depicting effigies of the fine Arts, sat with their parchment, lute or easel and yet hanging down their heads, looking away embarrassed as the goddess of pornography parades there brazenly above them. Similarly, hovering in the air before her as she walks there are three anguished cherubs, tearing at their hair as they berate her lewd display. Behind her blindfold, unaware of how she looks and rightly unconcerned by the controversy she's causing, utterly unworried by the precipice she steps along, the voluptuous essence of pornography is calm, serene. She trusts her safety to an animal conventionally seen as the epitome of dirtiness and brutish instinct, this despite its widely-mentioned cleanliness and keen intelligence. The goddess walks along her wall, proud and unmindful of the drop to either side, secure in her conviction that she is a thing of loveliness, safe in the knowledge that by following her noble and yet much-despised animal urge she will be led unerringly towards her rightful Queenly destiny.

Shameless and blind to all the outraged posturings occasioned by her presence, Venus promenades along the moral tightrope of her path, walking the pig, sure-footed and invulnerable in her glamour as she wanders, one step at a time, towards the hoped-for glow of a more human and enlightened future.





“I don’t want to be a commercial for the Death Machine”

TV on the Radio’s Kyp Malone talks about his band’s anti-Bush song “Dry Drunk Emperor” and the group’s recent tangles with U.S. militarism

Text by Jay Babcock
Photos by Jeremiah Garcia

“Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher”—a crucial line from an Allen Ginsberg poem, directed to Walt Whitman, that poet-scholar Lewis MacAdams recently pointed out—couldn’t help but remind me of finally meeting TV on the Radio’s Kyp Malone recently at a Massive Attack/TVOTR/Gang Gang Dance show at the Hollywood Bowl—as the Massive Attack set unfolded across the vast fogspace, I spotted Kyp walking across the Bowl’s midpoint transom, taking in the scene—and I ran after him, to ask him what had really gone down in Boston in August, when his band made the news because of their repeated anti-military recruiting statements from the stage—and to find out why the band’s “Dry Drunk Emperor” wasn’t included on the band’s new album—It was a song was recorded and released instantly onto the internet via Touch N Go in October 2005, in the immediate wake of the Bush government’s disastrous handling of Katrina. The song’s beautiful fury, soul-deep sadness and sensible proposals (“what if all the bleeding hearts took it on themselves to make a brand new start/ paint murals on the White House/feed the leaders LSD”) put TVOTR squarely in that foundational American tradition of courage-teaching graybeards—I caught up with Kyp, the song’s co-author, and owner of a graying beard, and we conferred—and the next night, after a TVOTR show at the all-ages Glass House in Pomona, we got the following convo on tape—



Arthur: I’m curious why ‘Dry Drunk Emperor’ isn’t on *Return to Cookie Mountain*.

Kyp Malone: We were right at the end of doing sessions for the album. Me and Dave [Sitek] had been passing back and forth this piece of music about the war in Iraq and living in a situation where the government had taken us into a war over a lie. An obvious lie, that we have to live with for the rest of our lives. [smiles] Unless some magic superhero from some other dimension comes down and changes it. Then Hurricane Katrina happened. We were in the studio and our friends in New York who have family in the Gulf Coast were coming by. We stopped working to watch the news and console our friends. When we started working again, I finished the lyrics and then we had it.

Dave and I felt really strongly about that song. It’s super-naïve now, but at the time it seemed very realistic that if we waited to put it on the album, it would be an irrelevant song because the person that it was directed to—George W. Bush—would be out of power. Because how could the whole nation watch what was happening with the war started over lies? There was no way that he could NOT get impeached. IF there was a reason to go to war—if there ever was in my lifetime—then maybe Afghanistan made sense. But they fucked that up and they went to Iraq for obviously selfish reasons. And then the biggest port in America gets crushed by a hurricane? Obviously they knew it was going to happen eventually. And then they fumble that. It’s important to take care of the biggest port in America. That’s important if you care about the country—if you’re a ‘patriot.’ But they fucked it up, and they fucked a bunch of people who historically had been fucked... If we get to the next phase and people remember



this country, I really wonder what they're gonna think about this time. And about race in particular. Pretending nothing is fucking wrong, when it's so blatantly obvious that it's fucked. I'm not saying nothing has ever been cleaned up since the inception of the country, [but] the fucking institution of slavery hasn't been cleaned up. Hasn't been cleaned up! And if you talk about it, people get bummed out because it's boring and uncomfortable and it makes people feel weird and 'you're just being sensitive' and not with the times.

What happened after Katrina, in the spring?

We were invited to open up for the Nine Inch Nails/Bauhaus tour—both bands I listened to a lot as a kid. It was pretty thrilling for me, and I learned a lot playing amphitheaters and House of Blues and Live Nation, which is the new Clear Channel. There was a really good communal feeling amongst all the bands. But at some point in Texas a week and a half into a three-week stint, me and Jaleel (TVOTR drummer/multi-instrumentalist) were walking past one of the big screens and they had a commercial running for Army or the Marines. Jaleel pointed it out to me and we were both aghast—what the fuck is that about? We walked out into the crowd and found the Marines were recruiting kids at the show. On the grounds. Right next to beer and taco stands and ice cream—the Marines! They had a contest: 'Come on! Let's see how many pull-ups you can do!' I couldn't believe it. I felt sick to my stomach.

Why did you feel sick?

Because I don't want to be a commercial for the death machine. I don't want to be a part of it. I don't think that there's any place at all in our creative community for that bullshit. It's anathema to what I believe in and to what I'm trying to do. So I got really uncomfortable. I called management to say if this is anyone's idea of a good idea then we can't be on this tour. Trent [Reznor] freaked out. He didn't know [the Marine

recruitment stations were there]. No one knew. It was actually in the contract that the Marines COULDN'T be there. But the Marines offer so much money to promoters that the promoters think maybe they can just slide it by and no one will call them on it. So Trent had them kicked off. And the venues were charged \$20,000 apiece to give to a non-profit working-for-peace organization, which is a pretty awesome way to handle it.

And that brings us to what happened in Boston in August when you played the WFNX-sponsored show headlined by your friends the Yeah Yeah Yeahs in City Hall Plaza to 12,000 people.

No offense to anyone who's born there, because we don't get to decide where we're born. But there's a James Baldwin quote about Boston which I find to be apt. He said, 'In Boston, when they shit on you, they hand you a towel—so that you can wipe their ass.' We got there and we were playing outside of Boston City Hall. And I'm looking around at all the corporate logos. I'm getting uncomfortable, but I'm used to it. I'm used to playing festivals. I've seen it a number of times. I've had the Verizon logo shine on my face at the House of Blues. [laughs] There's a lot that I've come to stomach, in this game, on this level. And then I see a Marine recruiting tent. I point it out to Dave. We're on the side of the stage. I don't know what to do about this. I still want to play for these kids that came out and I want to play with the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. We're about to go on. The DJs for this radio station that put on this show come onstage and they say, 'We want to introduce you.' We're like, 'We don't need you to introduce us!' I don't want them to talk about us. They don't know us. But they were really insistent. Like, 'It's our job!' Okay, do your thing. So they start talking, [in dumb voice] 'We wanna thank this corporation, and we wanna thank this corporation, and let's have a big round of applause for the Marine Corps.' At which point simultaneously me and Tunde grab the microphones and Tunde's like, 'We will walk. We will walk away from this right now. Don't applaud that shit. They don't belong here. They don't have any right to be here. We're not here for them. That is SEPARATE from us. That is separate from what we're doing. We want NOTHING to do with that.'

But I still felt like it was attached to us. Just the mere mention. Then I think, the US military is probably doing this in any place they can find right now—they're trying to get inside. The militarization of everyday life in this country. Which is pushing us closer and closer to totalitarianism.

What was happening in the crowd?

Well... It got confusing for people. A crowd can have its own opinion, which is why people get tomatoed off of stages. But people are

also conditioned to ACCEPT certain things. They accept [that] someone standing above them with a microphone is a voice of authority. And people who spend their lives speaking on the radio have that NAILED. Then I was just ANGRY. And before every song I was like, 'This song is about not joining the Marines. And this song is about not joining the Marines. And this song is about not joining the Marines.' [laughs] It could have been a lot more fun for everybody, but what are you gonna do? The energy was different. The whole time I was trying to ERASE the idea that they'd turned us into a commercial for an institution that is engaged in something immoral and horrific.

What happened when you walked offstage?

The security and the cops who were working the event started vibing us really hard. I was talking to the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, trying to tell them about what happened, because I didn't think they were even cognizant of any of it. The head of security was all up in Jaleel's face and Timmy [our guitar tech] and Gerard's face and the cops were standing behind him. Like [in deep voice] 'You're not welcome here anymore. You're not welcome in Boston. You need to leave!' There's a lot of great people in Boston, I want to be able to play in Boston. But it's always going to be BOSTON. I talked to the DJ afterward. He was like, 'What, are you guys pacifists or something?' I went, 'Uh, no, not really. But that's not the point at all. I don't want to be a commercial for the Marines—or anything else, but particularly not the Marines.' He's like, 'Yeah, well, you know they pay a lot of money and we gotta pay you.' And I go, Well, let us know where the money's coming from. Because if it's coming from the Marines, we're not gonna play the show. ⑧





let the kids in too

A History of All-Ages, Part II: A session with ex-Black Flag bassist Chuck Dukowski.

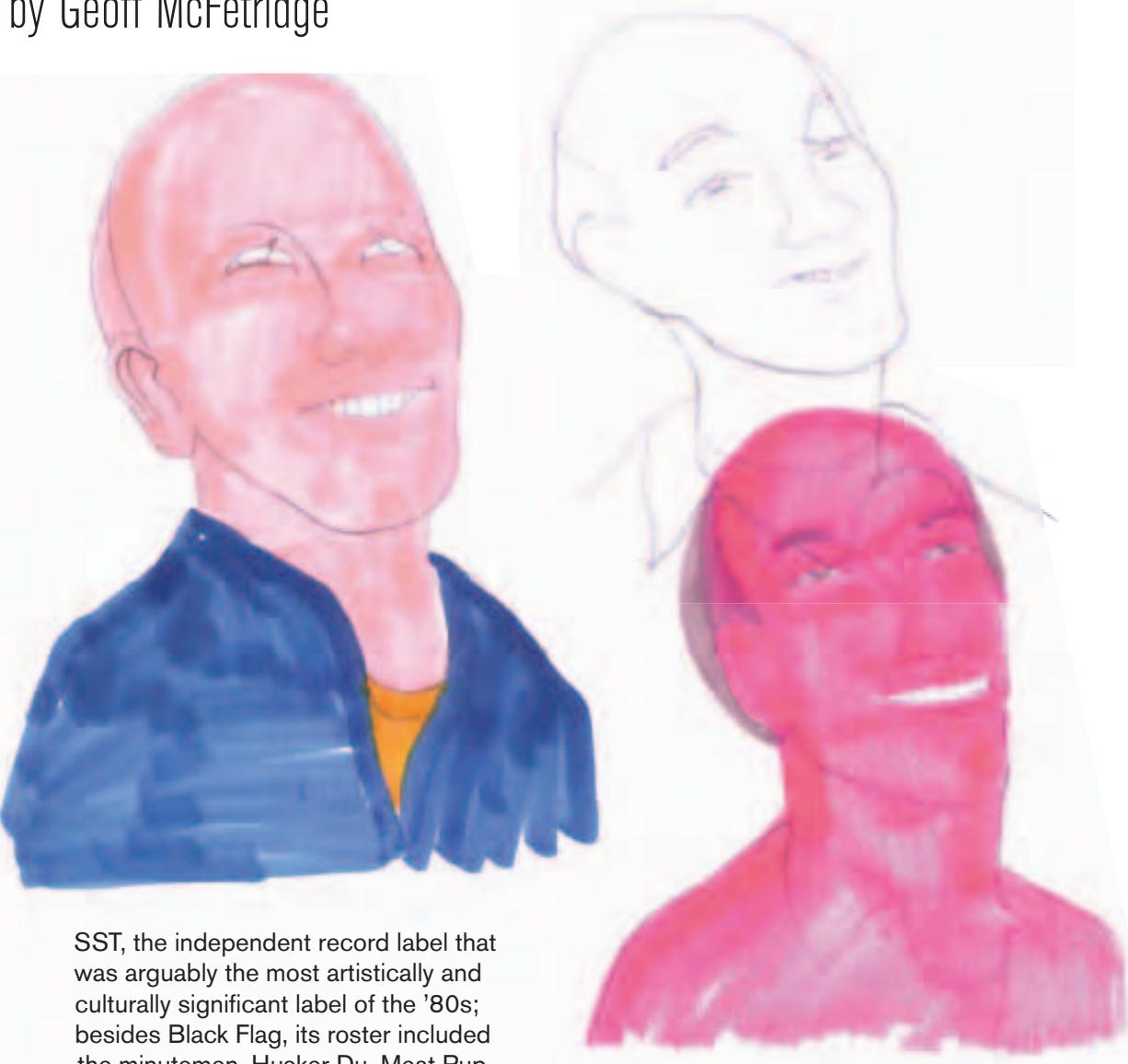
By Jay Babcock, with artwork by Geoff McFetridge

For whatever reason, it wasn't until earlier this year that I realized the best music events in Los Angeles were missing something really crucial: people under 21. That is, under-21s—let's call them 'kids'—are routinely excluded from seeing of-the-moment bands and old masters, in relatively accessible and human-sized settings, at an affordable price. These kinds of shows almost always happen in over-21 bars; or in tiny clubs, in sketchy environs, late on school nights. Occasionally they happen in Clear Channel/Live Nation-managed venues—amphitheatres, sports arenas, football fields—but even there it takes heavy change (\$65 to see The Mars Volta open for the Red Hot Chili Peppers at the 18,000-capacity Forum?!?), and most of the time all you get is an accountant's idea of spectacle. Put simply, kids today are deprived of the formative live music experiences that previous generations of human beings—of almost all cultures, from here back to the cave days—experienced as a matter of routine. Music: intimate, intense, performed as something deeper than mere commerce, and received by the community of listeners in the same way.

If music succeeds in connecting to kids today, it is in spite of the music industry, not because of it. How do we know this? Because that's what some of us have experienced for ourselves, and, more importantly, because that's what those who came before us tell us—see the comments by blues-jazz scholar/poet/MC5 manager John Sinclair in Part I of this series, published last issue, and see the following conversation with a punk rock legend...

A Session With Chuck Dukowski

Chuck Dukowski played bass and wrote several key songs for seminal American punk rock band Black Flag in the late '70s and early '80s. Besides being (to quote the writer James Parker) the "attitude engine" of Black Flag, Dukowski played an integral role in the day-to-day operations of California-based



SST, the independent record label that was arguably the most artistically and culturally significant label of the '80s; besides Black Flag, its roster included the Minutemen, Husker Du, Meat Puppets, Opal, Saccharine Trust, Screaming Trees and Soundgarden. Today, Chuck rocks the nation as bassist in the Chuck Dukowski Sextet, an acid rock/freakout four-piece featuring his wife Nora, his son Milo, and legendary L.A. reedsman Lynn Johnston.

Arthur: What were the first shows that you attended?

Chuck Dukowski: The very first ones were giant arena concerts. Long Beach Arena in particular. And then shortly subsequent to that, movie theaters being used as the venues that could hold in the hundreds. You'd see bands like Little Richard, Captain Beefheart, Spirit ... bands that weren't filling the arenas.

They were all-ages, no booze involved.

Was there a rule about where Black Flag would play?

We tried to play all-ages venues as much as possible. Because ultimately, we could play to 3-4,000 people in all-ages here in Los Angeles as early as 1980. We'd play to that many people, and turn around and play a place with an age limit, and we'd be cutting the audience to 250-300—a huge difference.

What about outside of Los Angeles?

In the beginning of my touring in Black Flag in the late '70s and the early '80s, there were quite a few states where the drinking age was 18. And so you're playing Ohio, where the drinking age is 18, and there's piles and piles of piles of people there. Once you get to 18,



it's harder to differentiate [laughs], and so things open up. It's harder to tell the difference between a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old or a 19-year-old, so they kind of let everybody in who wasn't obviously young, really young, say, 13. But yeah, if you were 16, you were probably getting in.

So they were essentially over-16 shows. Now, when the national drinking age was raised to 21 in 1984, bands had to make a choice about which audience to play to: the over-21 bar scene, or the all-ages situation. And nightclubs could outbid all-ages venues to hire bands, so bands would end up playing there to the degree that they needed—or wanted—the guaranteed money.

I can remember booking artists at SST. The bars would have a small room, 200 people, and be able to offer bands thousands of dollars to be there because they could figure on selling so much alcohol. Booze is the vice, the crack, of the live entertainment world. Look what's happened to jazz. It's moved into supper houses. They're technically all-ages, but those places can be expensive situations to get into, which limits that music's audience to the people who are affluent enough to become part of that. I think it's rough for young people to get involved in that. At least the punk rock scene and all the offshoots has some more open-ness and more alternative venues, and anybody can play anything. Places like the Smell and II Corral in Los Angeles today, where anybody can go and hear all kinds of music too. Ultimately, the more vital music is happening in the more open-ended situations. When I play an all-ages show these days, there's more people there than if it weren't all-ages, and they're more involved and open to what we're doing. They're people who are interested in learning new things, not just getting what they had yesterday.

But those all-ages venues can only be so big, or be so accessible, before they run into trouble.

It's a tough game. In my experience, the people who tried to have these all-ages places eventually had troubles. Look at the Vex, who had to move several times. Every time things would start to take off for them, they would start to have troubles with the police, and eventually lose their permits or something like that would happen. They'd get pushed out, or the owner of the building would get pressure from the police or the city, and be told 'Do something about this, or we'll do something about it.'

Urban clubowners have told me that they are reluctant to make many of their shows all-ages, because you're setting up underage drinking situations, potential rape situations. I can sorta accept that. But on the other hand, Of course, beer is served at baseball games and there's ten-year-olds there, too.

Sure. Every restaurant in the city with a liquor license will serve beer to a table where there are underaged people present. We have a 13-year-old daughter and I don't want to see anything happen to her, but I think she's got pretty good wits, too. I think you've got to give people under 21 a little bit of credit and give them a chance to learn about things. The world's not Disneyland. Ultimately it's both better and potentially more real, potentially more dangerous, but the dangers are different. Sure, there's some weirdos out there. So a kid's gotta learn how to watch out for the creepy people. At some point you need to trust your kids that they can take care of themselves. And if you're really worried, you can be there, too! You can party with them!

But yeah, it's a tough game because you've got the people in power who don't want to have places where young people can get together easily in any numbers, to associate and trade ideas and have some community besides the schools where they're super-segregated and super-repressed. I remember when Chief Davis, our former police chief, said in an interview, 'What you need to do is bear down on them when they're young. You break them like a horse and then you can ride them the rest of their lives.'

Whoa.

I think it was Davis, maybe it was his predecessor, but I remember reading that in the damn paper! Motherf*ck! It was something that I, on the outside of things, had been thinking was going on, and now I realized that that was what was going on. We'd go do our concert, come outside and see the cops beating up all the people who came to hear us. And they would focus in on the young girls to sort of ... well, it was a way to attack the masculinity of the boy she was with, and also attack her sense of safety. It was like that picture of the guy from the Middle Class with that girl and they were all bruised up from that thing over at the MacArthur Park Elks Lodge. They'd bust them all up, breaking legs and arms. Just beating the crap out of people. It was all about keeping people down and showing them who's boss before they get a chance to feel like they can do something with their lives.

What do you think happens to a culture when under-21-year-olds can't go to a show?

I think it becomes more heartless and more, I don't know ... I think everyone loses. I can remember sitting outside a concert and thinking that it was a mistake for those artists to be missing out on my energy and everybody else's energy.

You know, about a year and a half ago, I went to a friend's party where he had these Jarocho musicians playing. The music is from the Veracruz part of Mexico, it's a kind of music that's African and indigenous. These groups are made up of extended families. So the whole group of this extended family is performing in different combinations and different groups, from the oldest people to the youngest: everybody's getting their little cameos, everybody's playing support to everybody else or taking a moment where they're the 'star,' so to speak. What was interesting to me was the breakdown of the ageism. Everybody was participating in it. I started thinking that this is probably closer to where people are coming from, naturally.

The division by age is probably on purpose. There's always a desire to divide and pit various groups in the culture against one another, and thereby weaken any chance of people getting together and coming up with alternatives to the governmental infrastructure for holding things together, and the giant corporations and things that hire them. It's like at school, where they line everybody up by age, and then have them line up by height, or make them learn to march in lines: all of this kind of programming and dividing people up, and ultimately pitting them against one another, is so that they're easier to control. It's so much easier to take advantage of somebody who is denied the insights of their forebears. It's so much easier to take advantage of somebody if they are robbed of the energy of their offspring. I think you need to keep everybody engaged with each other, and then the culture is rich, and has the life and vitality of the whole human family that's there.

NEXT ISSUE: A survey of the nation's all-ages 'scene' of the '80s and '90s, featuring interviews with Ian MacKaye (Minor Threat, Fugazi, Dischord), Calvin Johnson (Beat Happening, Dub Narcotic Sound System, K Records) and Jim Ward (At the Drive In).



DARKENING THE WORLD FROM SEPTEMBER

‘The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents.’

H.P. Lovecraft

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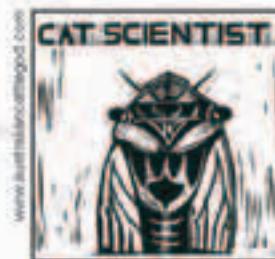
H. P. LOVECRAFT ILLUSTRATED



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Comprised of members of Hella, Pinback, and The Advantage, Holy Smokes are a supergroup better than the sum of its incalculably impressive parts. This is barefoot shoegazing on a bed of hot coals.



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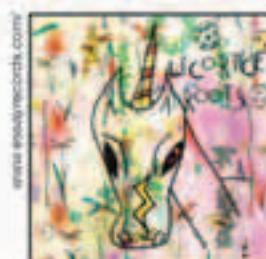
Brand new stuff from Jamaica's master thinker. A true pioneer, Perry has opened the door for countless sound styles. Features bonus disc busting out collaborations with TV on the Radio, George Clinton, and DJ Spooky.



Derek Bailey/
Cyro Baptista
Derek
AME 23



Our improv-guitar hero Derek Bailey lives on through this intimate musical celebration, in collaboration with downtown NYC percussion/vocal master Cyro Baptista.



Licorice Roots
Shades of Streamers
SPA 13



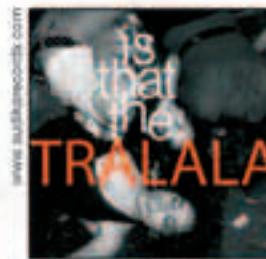
Licorice Roots return with their latest masterpiece, the most recent foray into their world of lush and literate psychedelic pop. The long-awaited third album, with over sixty-eight minutes of emotionally charged and musically stunning imagery, easily surpasses both of their previous cult classic albums.



The International
Playboys
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ACG 9



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TRALALA
Is That the TRALALA?
ADK 1008



Brooklyn's latest and greatest pop-punk sensations' new album overflows with songs that will make you dance, drink, fight, and make up all at the same time. Includes covers of the classic Wipers anthem "Mystery" and Giorgio Moroder's "Underdog".

"Just stupid brilliant." — Time Out NY

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THE TIME HAS COME TO STAND UP FOR THE RULE OF LAW

For six years, the Bush Administration has ridden roughshod over the Constitution and federal and international law, in pursuit of an all-powerful Executive branch.

When the President authorized the indefinite detention of enemy combatants at Guantánamo Bay, the express purpose was to imprison detainees in a place where the law cannot reach. When he authorized the National Security Agency to listen in on phone calls without a warrant, it was explicitly in violation of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which grants broad powers to the government, and provides checks to prevent abuse. The President is sworn to defend and uphold the Constitution, but this President simply does not believe it applies to him. It's time to reaffirm that our country is governed by laws and not men. It's time to impeach George Bush for persistently violating the law.

Join us by encouraging your Representative to bring or support articles of impeachment in the House. Below is a sample letter for you to use; we encourage you to modify and personalize the letter to your Congressperson as appropriate.

Re: Article of Impeachment

Dear Representative:

I am writing to request that you join with other Representatives in calling for hearings and the prompt initiation of proceedings to impeach President George W. Bush, under Article I, Section 2 of the United States Constitution.

President Bush has committed high crimes and misdemeanors and has failed to take care to see that the laws of the United States are faithfully executed. He has led us into war in Iraq on the basis of lies and deception. He has violated both the Constitution and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act by authorizing the warrantless electronic surveillance of telecommunications in this country. He has permitted United States officers and agents to engage in the torture of prisoners in violation of international law and the laws of this country. He failed to prevent the loss of life and other injuries caused by the foreseeable catastrophe that resulted from flooding from Hurricane Katrina and failed promptly to come to the aid of those in need.

It is time to return to the rule of law and to restore the elements of constitutional democracy that have been ignored and undermined during the presidency of George W. Bush.

Sincerely yours,
U.S. Tax-Paying Citizen

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CONTINUED FROM PG 10

Douglas Rushkoff

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE REALITY TUNNEL

have it believed. At least by enough people to make a difference.

While by far the majority of comments and email since then have been very positive both towards Bob and about the effort to keep him solvent and cared for, there's plenty of cynicism out there, too. "Why should he get cared for over some other sick and poor person?" one egalitarian asked. "He should have managed his money better," another complained to me (like I have time to read emails from people who have decided not to help Bob when I can barely process the ones from people looking to help). "I already paid him when I bought his book," explained another, who best exemplified the trend. It's the logic of a perverted sort of libertarianism—one that can't see beyond its own very limited notion of the competitive marketplace.

For even if we use the raw logic of the market, Bob is simply being paid back for the value he created. Those of us who are contributing to Robert Anton Wilson now are still, in effect, paying residuals on what we got from him. We've all bought plenty of twenty-dollar books—but few have been worth as much to us as Bob's. The works generated value for us over time, and we see fit to share this wealth in the form of cash energy with the person who created it for us. This is not the order of a free market economy, but of what might better be called a free market ecology.

"Economics" is based on the assumption that people act in ways that maximize their wealth as individuals. It holds true for many situations. All else being equal, we'll buy products at the best price we can get them and take the highest wage we can find. The assumption is that we act out of selfishness—and economics is just its rational application. Under the laws of economics, we wouldn't pay for the same book twice.

An ecology, on the other hand, though wildly competitive and occasionally just as cruel as any economy, is based on interdependency. The members of a coral reef or slime mold know how to take coordinated action when it's called for. The shit of one organism is fertilizer for another. An ecology still operates under the assumption of maximizing wealth, but of the whole collective organism—and over time.

By refusing to let Robert Anton Wilson die penniless, we—as a culture, or at least part of a culture—are caring for a certain kind of thinking and activity, even if this is after the fact. By doing so, we not only acknowledge to Robert Anton Wilson the tremendous contributions he made to our lives, but we have the opportunity to reaffirm the same thing to ourselves. Like college alumni who reinforce their own positive feelings about their alma maters when they make donations to keep the institution going, we publicly affirm the value of Bob's legacy—thus making it more valuable or at least less dismissible for a society bent on recontextualizing the Sixties, psychedelia and mental adventurousness as an embarrassing phase.

Just look at the recent spate of articles accompanying the tenth anniversary of Timothy Leary's death, as well as Bob Greenfield's recent biography. These writers are all-too ready to condemn Leary for his undeniably self-centered personality, but all-too reluctant to acknowledge his even more powerfully compassionate, activist nature that spurred him to sacrifice pretty much everything for his vision of an intelligent human species that needn't destroy itself. It's as if embracing our inner "hope fiend" is as uncool today as, I dunno, believing that anyone who sets pen to paper or text to a blog is doing it for an ulterior, profit-based motive.

And all this is what I attempted to explain to the magazine executives in Germany yesterday. At their best, magazines—like any cultural product—serve their audiences not merely through their own value, but by allowing their readers to create value for themselves and one another. Sure, this means understanding that a magazine's true customers are the readers, not the advertisers—a lesson that quality pay-TV is fast teaching their ad-based broadcast counterparts.

It's also why I changed agents. Not because the first one was bad in any way, but because I met one who challenged me to consider what I thought was the most significant contribution to the world, rather than what might be expected to sell the most out of the gate. This is not the way most people who call themselves "literary agents" speak. It's economics in reverse; not "how can I get the most value from my efforts," but "how can I create the most value for everyone through them?"

Those of us dedicated to keeping Robert Anton Wilson's flesh and finale as dignified as possible are rewarding a great writer for never selling out. But this ethos must not end with the passage of this individual, however heroic—not when he's given us so many of the tools required to turn this society's notion of value inside-out. If we've learned anything through all this, it's that the universe we're creating together needn't be one where no good deed is left unpunished.



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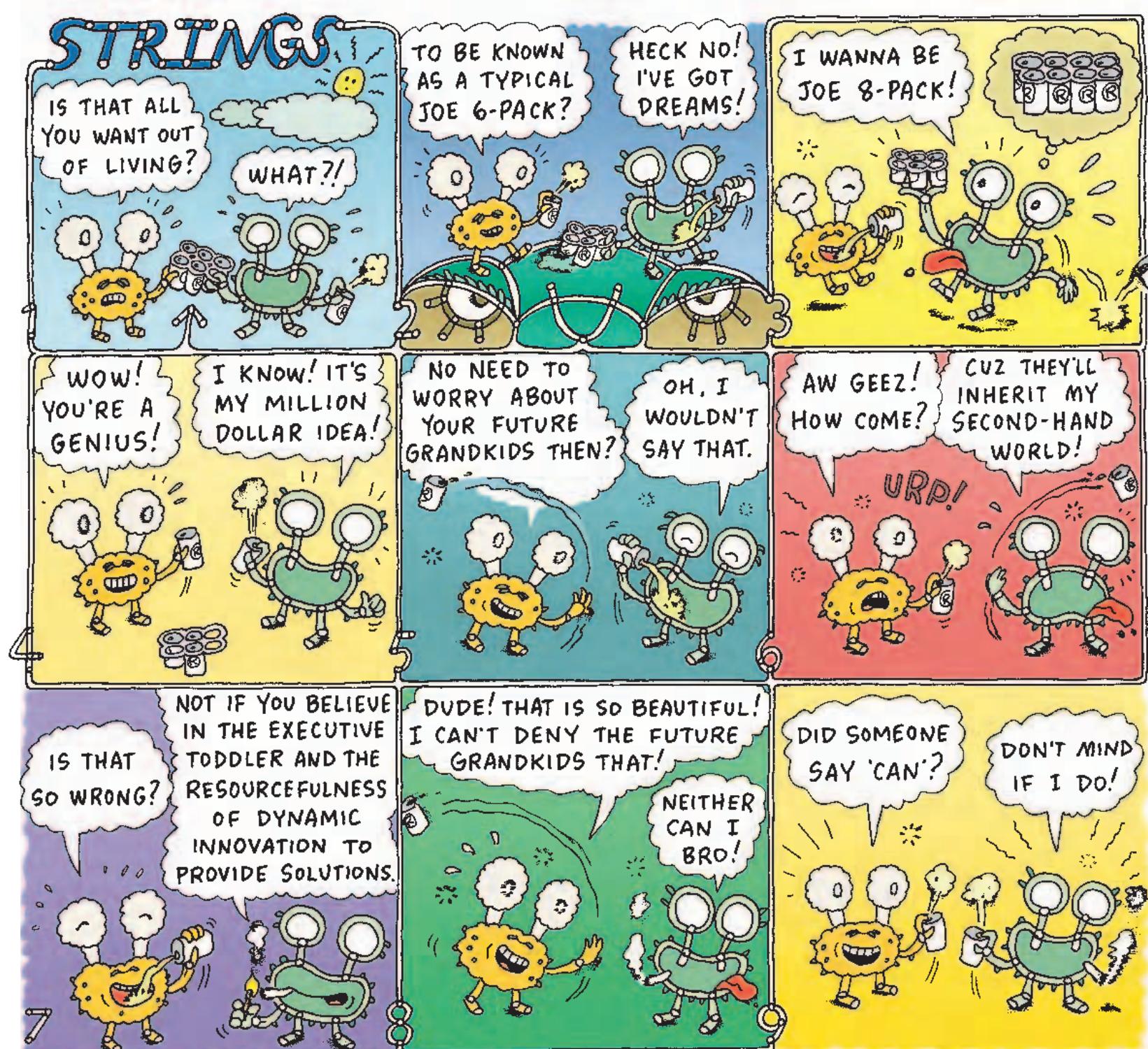
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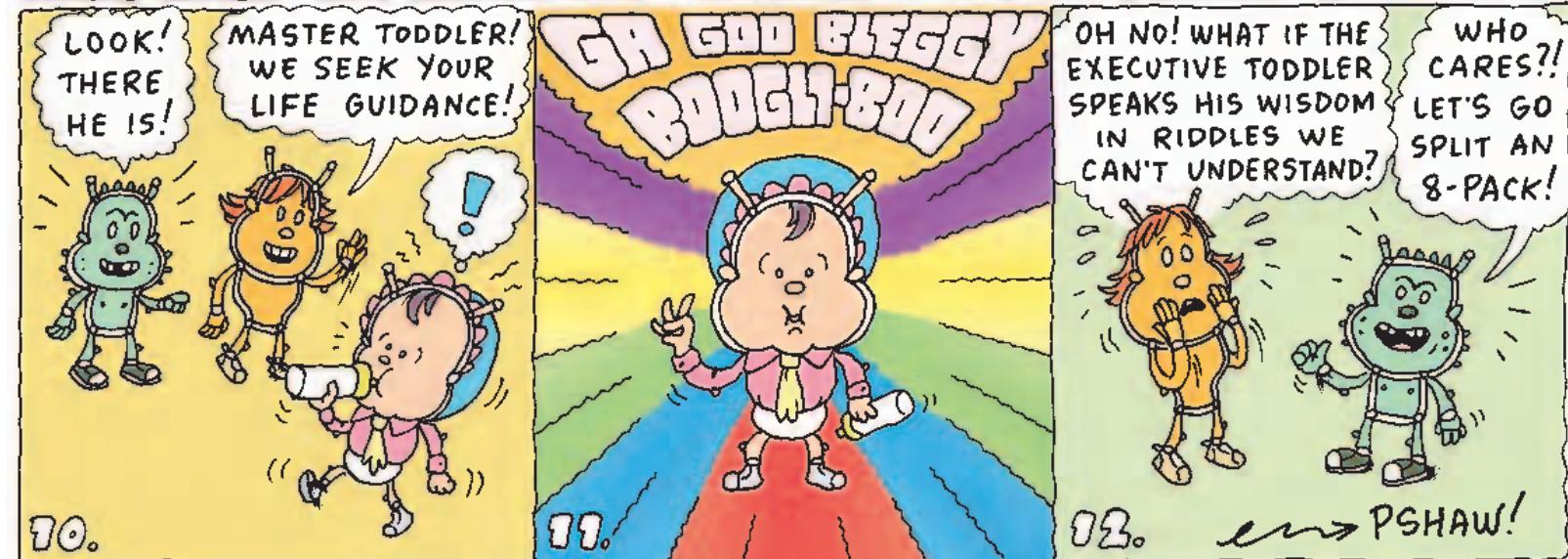
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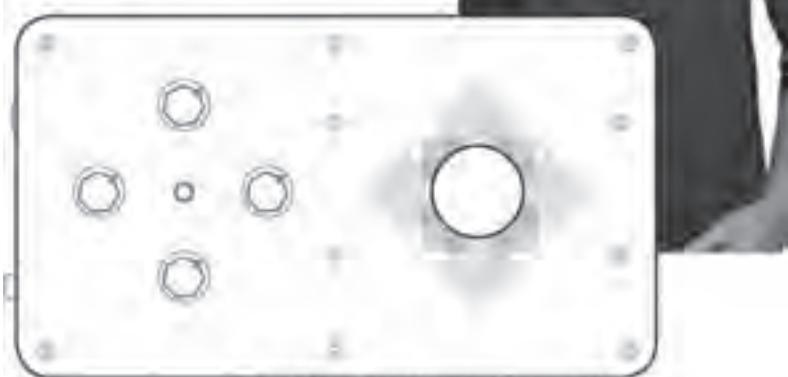


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BULL TONGUE

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'exploring the voids of all
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Kommissar Hjuler & Mama Bar are a married couple from Flensburg, Germany. Hjuler is an artist into collecting art-music and outsider weirdo records. He met Mama when she was 17 and the two of them live out in some mysterious house of cosmic wonder, where they record all kinds of bizarre jams and release them on their own Schöne-Hjuler-Memorial-Fond label in editions of 5 to 50. If you look on their site you can see their discography which is massive and, for the most part, sold out. We were finally able to grip a copy of their 100th release, fortuitously in an edition of 100. *Wiederaufnahmeverfahren III/06* (SHMF) is a split LP by the two and if it's any indicator of the Fluxus pleasure found on the previous 99 releases, then someone please start eBaying those discs cuz we need to hear more. Mama's side starts with a series of similar sounding high pitched noise junk jolts, then develops into a Rita Ackermann-esque investigation of nursery rhyme sensuality, becoming alluringly repetitive and ultimately crazed as Mama's lovely sing-song voice is transformed into deep-pit screams of anguish. Wicked. Kommissar's side is more typically dada, running some very damaged no-fidelity frequencies against Germanic babble. The record comes in three different editions. One has a box with the LP, art, plus other sundries, and it's cool to see the pair's ephemeral clutter, particularly the art they make—hers, abstract paint; his, twisted eros collage. But the recordings are what's key here for sure. A fucked earfull.

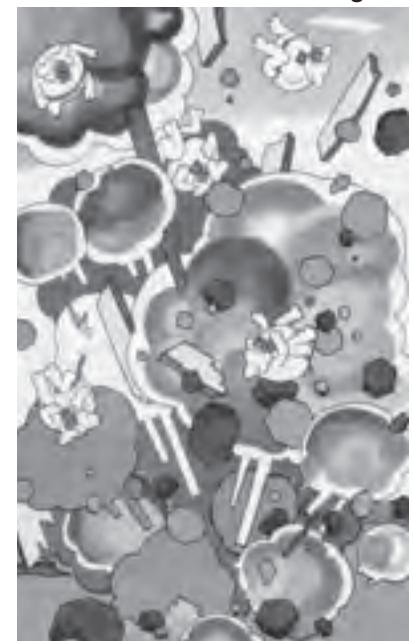
Ah, Belgium...perhaps not a comment we utter as often as we might, but it has a nice feel as it flutters over the tongue. And that's just what it does when *Satanische Vrede*, the debut LP by Belgium's **Silvester Anfang** (K-RAA-K) is playing. So rural, psych and folky they almost sound Finnish, Silvester Anfang is a Maldegem-based outfit whose membership changes with weather and circumstance. They use a barrage of standard rock instruments, but also lotsa odd-sounding string and percussion bits, to create a loopily chiming instrumental sound, more explicitly "out" (in improvisational terms) than most similarly styled units. There's nothing precious about this, and it teeters very close to the vibe produced by ostensible post-jazzbos, such as the Sea & Sun Ensemble. Which means there's good gobbling for the whole trough. **R.O.T.**'s *L'ecurie* LP (K-RAA-K) is another explorational Belgian dive into some kinda forest primeval, but their journey is more about electro-acoustic tents propped up by crackling electronic fires in the middle of dark glens. Improvised in a kitchen, this is the sort of music horses hear right before they go to sleep. For good.

The most mind-felching graphics comp to come along lately is definitely the sixth edition of **Sammy Harkham's Kramers Ergot** (Buenavista Press). This large paperback is a headrush from beginning to end. It checks in on most of the interesting styles of art currently residing in the graphics underground, from semi-realistic to primitive to raty to psychedelic to computer-generated. It's one of those books you'll look at 'til your eyes get tired, then return to as soon as they're well

rested. Contributors include **Gary Panter**, **Paper Rad**, **Jeff LaDouceur**, **Suiho Tagawa** and more; the visuals range from single panel gags to long, complex sagas. Amazing. Buenavista has a couple more solid new titles out also. There's *Private Stash*, a sleeved, accordion-style portfolio of glamour and nude drawings by **Crumb**, **Clowes**, **Bagge**, **Burns**, **Panter**, the **Hernandez Bros.** and others. There's also issue 8 of *Comic Art*, which is a more serious journal devoted to the history of comics. This issue has a great piece on **S. Clay Wilson**'s newly discovered juvenilia (more on him later), a long **Drew Friedman** profile, stuff on the pulp art of **Edd Cartier**, and much more to tickle the brain of the form's devotees. **John Yee's Arf Museum** (Fantagraphics) has a second issue out as well, also taking a somewhat scholarly in-depth approach. Yee's passion, however, is the juncture between "high art" and comics, so this issue explores that crease. Our fave things this issue are a great **Mort Walker** piece about meeting Roy Lichtenstein and a survey of gorilla 'n girl art, but you'll undoubtedly have your own picks.

The young and dapper **Alex Neilson** of Glasgow, Scotland is a polite and altogether engaging fellow. He is also one of the most exciting free-spirit percussionists shaking shit up in these halcyon days. His fusion of traditional and avant-garde folk inspirations with free jazz exploration is young and tender and, like a fine clotted cream, superbly succulent. He records with **Taupis Tula**, a trio consisting also of **David Keenan** and **Heather Leigh Murray** (proprietors of the Glaswegian record store, Volcanic Tongue) and was a live collaborator on **Jandek**'s initial sightings. What we have here is his latest solo sloopo, *An Old Soul At The Helm* (Chocolate Monk), recorded under the **Directing Hand** moniker. Drawing from the percussive history/mind of such stalwart beat babes as **Millard Graves**, **Chris Corsano** and **Tsuchitoro Toshiyuki**, then snuggling it with a heartfelt

suiho tagawa





BULL TONGUE



Charles Burns art in *Private Stash* portfolio

hug for Scottish countryside balladeering is a right-on move to our ears. This CDR, featuring through-the-haze vocal accompaniment by **Christina Carter** on one track, is the goddamn cheese. Get it and track down his previous sides on *Secret Sound*, *Memoirs Of An Aesthete* and—definitely—the new LP, *Belsayer Time* (Time-Lag) by the trio of **Neilson, Alastair Galbraith** and **Richard Youngs**. This is music for the ages and a fantastic visit from New Zealand's Galbraith. Side one is all wheatgrass and psilocybin while side two is electric jagged crystal strikes. A total must. Power trio of the year.

Oren Ambarchi has long been one of the more interesting figurines on the Australian event horizon. His work with the **Menstruation Sisters** and **Sunn O)))** is perhaps his best-known stuff, but he released a deadly series of LPs in the late '90s exploring explicit experimental techniques for electric guitar. He has now returned to this concept with the *Stacte Motors* LP (Western Vinyl) and it's something worth uncorking immediately. Like the legendary **Remko Scha**, Ambarchi employs machines to play his guitar strings here. Rotating motors with strings attached slap the guitar in a hypnotically-rhythmic fashion while the hum of electricity and various overlays raise the shimmer-potential to extreme heights. Comprised of two long pieces, the album is trance inducing in the best possible way. Ambarchi also works with Australian sound artist, **Scott Horscroft**, on a split LP shared with the late Japanese experimentalist, **Takahito Nakazato** (Textile). More guitars are machined on his side, although the results emphasize clutter over calm. Recording as **Hado Ho**, Takahito's offering is a surprisingly laidback series of sounds produced by amp noise, microphones and bad connections. For all that, it has enough open space inside it for the listener to breathe, which isn't always the case when Japanese noise is on the box.

S.F. guitar improvisor **Henry Kaiser** has released *Domo Arigato Derek-sensei!* (Balance Point Acoustics), a wonderful tribute CD to his mentor the late, great Derek Bailey. It delivers a fantastic display of Kaiser's brain-finger-string-amp process/result with a choice selection of collaborators including **Charles K. Noyes, Henry Kuntz, Toshinori Kondo, Andrea Centazzo, Davey Williams, Mototeru Takagi, John Oswald**, Derek himself and more. The whole thing runs with spontaneous spoken word memorials interspersed throughout by Kaiser. It's a sweet and funny fireside chat of a concert, very attuned to Derek's perpetual spirit. All profits from the CD sales go to Incus Records, Derek (and his partner, **Karen Brookman**)'s long-running chronicle of the improvised music world. And all material is live and free. Natch.

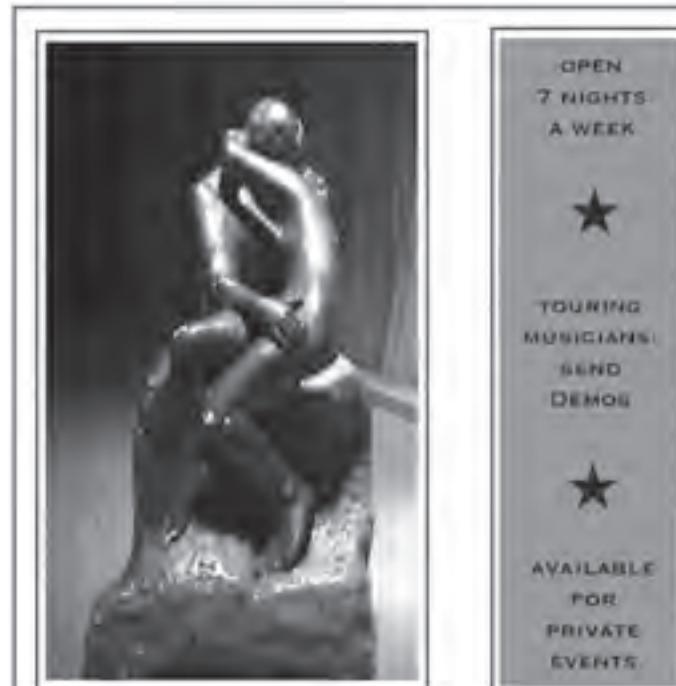
Norwegian **Kjetil Brandsdal**, used to be an experimental guitarist as well, but he dropped that hat in the gutter. The split LP by two of his current bands, **Noxagt** and **Ultralyd** (Textile) features two very raucous sides of proletarian urk. The Noxagt material comes from early rehearsals (or radio shows or something) and consists of short slabbed chunks of goofy noise, including a cover of **Toni Basil's** "Mickey." Ultralyd's stuff is more feedback-scrambled in its orientation, but still pleasant as getting very soft fur stuck in your eye. Same could be said of Noxagt's eponymous third LP (*Load*), which is a brilliant, lunk-headed lurch through instrumental forests of progressive criminality.

Most brilliant, sickest art book to power down the drain in ages is *The Art of S. Clay Wilson* (Ten Speed Press). Wilson is the Nebraska-born artist who freed Robert Crumb to follow the siren call of his id, and this collection is a horribly thorough dive into his oeuvre. From early sketches through comic pages, book covers and more recent color bloodfests, this book is stunner. Wilson's characters—bikes, pirates, cowboys, beatniks, demons, et al.—wage sense-war on the masses with an obscene strength that is unmatched in documented history. Approach with extreme caution and all your holes open.

Crown Now produce exactly what **To Live And Shave in L.A.**'s croon king, **Tom Smith**, must have sounded like as a kid in the backwoods with his Boones Farm-addled pals. With pimple-powered early **Suckdog** energy, this duo of delirious nerdnihs howl along with broken records and messed up tapes, using their shitty microphones' on/off switches to great effect. Love it! Ain't nothing like the future, baby. This is one of four debut releases on **Jessica Rylan's** new cassette label, **Friendship Bracelet**. The others are **Bone Rattle**, two freaks who also perform as **Dreamhouse** (whose *Shake* cassette is bunghole sludge dynamism) (which equals: awesome!). Then there's *Cough It Up* by the **Halflings**, another teen combo taking on power electronic goodness. If Jessica is gonna be the den mom of noise, then the kids are definitely alright.

UK shit-noise label Turgid Animal have been releasing all kinds of brit-slime mostly revolving around the **Mutant Ape/Filthy Turd** axis (which we touched on last column). A particularly interesting split cassette by **M.O.A.C.** and **Coco & Fiend Friend Mononoke** (ta043) nearly had us driving the Volvo off into Route 9's guard rails. M.O.A.C. (**Mystic Occult Aid Ceremony**) is a Japanese woman now living in Boston who really delivers classic Japanoise aktion (lately overshadowed by the new bleat of the West). Not only is it exciting and refreshing to hear someone really re-investigate this sound-world once again, but she gives it an enticing contempo edge. If you're an old fan of **Vanilla** cassette wildness, this momma is yours. **Coco & Fiend Friend** is two mates really digging chaos, spliced depravity and all the farting mantraz thereof. Extra cruddy. But what is here is ass buhlasting.

Another couple new installments of the great **Hello Trudi** have arrived. First is *Busyness for the Self*, which seems more overtly smutty than some previous issues (although maybe it's just our mood). The second's *You Want to Hear a Simple Story of a Swimsuit Model*, another un-linear grapple with words and drawings created in the post-Pettibonian universe, containing one of the best **Crass** references seen inside the art

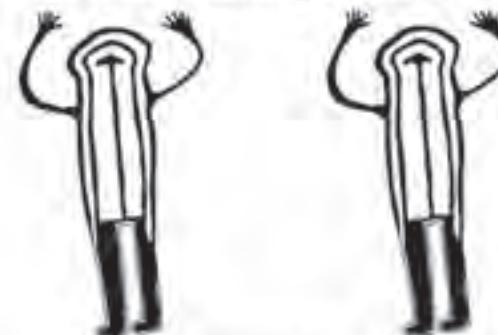


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world in many a moon. New issue of *The Chuckwagon* is *Midnight* by **Dave Newman**. It's one of the best in the series thus far, a funny, black verse novelette about what it's like to mop floors in the company of drugphilospher. The latest *Shuffleboil* has a fine topless **Cecil Taylor** photo on the cover and **Clark Coolidge**'s ruminations on that 10-CD *Taylor* box *Codanza* put out. There's plenty of other stuff, too. The standard, brilliant collage of poetry and prose about improvised music and jazz we've come to expect from editors **David Meltzer** and **Steve Dickinson**. *Ong Ong* #3 arrived in a glassine envelope packed with various random goodies, all of which were nice to examine. As was the mag's actual contents, which featured interviews with the **Grey Daturas**, **Slim Moon** (now outdated, since he's moving to NYC) a portfolio of show fliers, a CD with **Ghost Family** (among others) and plenty more.

Among all the sensational exploits of mind cremation at No Fun Festival 2006, the one that had all in attendance either laughing or crying or both, was the hyper-vicious goofbomb noise circus of **Macronympha**. Along with the group's stalwarts, two sexually weirded females (one a frozen ice queen friend, the other a saucy asskicker) were loose among the stage melee of oil drums, drunken groping meat claws and an upended card table (which subsequently chopped an audience member's dick off). Pretty fucking cool gig and one that still has noise bloggers discussing its merits and ramifications. We're not here to defend or analyze Macronympha's aesthetics of pain and pleasure. We really just wanna lean back and exclaim "holy shit" after experiencing their *Mugwump Reformer Mixes* CD (Audio Dissection). Recorded in their sicko hometown of Pittsburgh in 1995 (as the rare and legendary Pittsburgh, PA LP on Praxis Dr. Bearmann) and remixed earlier this year, this CD may technically be the best sounding American necro-sexual harsh noise release to date. (Or at least since the ear world profundity of *To Live And Shave In L.A.*'s 2004 opus, *The Wigmaker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg*.) Massive dynamic range is heard and felt and the stereo field of regret and rot is remarkably insane. The folded insert is a proto-typical Macronympha image-bust w/ horrific disease and terror alongside explicit porn punks and panties. A must have.

Speaking of No Fun, the label office of this enterprise has been squeezing out some nice and sleazy little runs of primo US noise LPs. The recent one by **C. Spencer Yeh**, *Three Sisters Who Share An Eye* (No Fun Rotten LP #5), has this cochlea-splitting Ohioan stepping outside and around his **Burning Star Core** moniker and recording a disk that just fucking blows doors on everything around it. We've raved on about Yeh's meat salad science in the past, but the mug keeps getting more and more wrecked. Essential listening from top to bottom. Another is *Oscillators '87 Guitar '88* by **Jim O'Rourke** (No Fun Rotten LP #4) which is also just 300 copies and completely nuts—easily one of the most testes-tingling O'Rourke discs EVER. Both sides move along with a zen blood focus. The music is like power cables swaying to the earth's heavy action with 60 zillion watts of juice silently streaming inside. Damn, dude!

Speaking of explicit porn punks, no one's more noise-coitus graphic right now than Boston's mighty **Two Dead Sluts One Good Fuck**, a fantastic duo (sometimes trio) who go way out of their way to ensure

everyone's having a fuck of a time. Their *P.T. Barnum's Gallery Of Masturbatorial Disenchantment* CD on *Kitty Play* (a label which the group "dropped" for various reasons, all noted on their MySpace blog) is a masterpiece of messed up boy skum energy, where lead screamers grow ferocious red beards and pound their skinny white chests with cum drunk revelry. Nice. And very nasty, the sleeve is a wraparound of dripping schlongs and girl-on-girl oral communication. Top shelf! And sexcellent "driving" music, to boot.

Sheesh. Long time since we (or anyone) opened a new *Helios Creed* LP. But here is *Deep Blue Love Vacuum* (*Noiseville*), which fills not one, but two LPs. Anyone who ever loved his earlier solo slop, or his time in the classic period of **Chrome**, should have their drool nozzles well tweaked by this. Veering between thick cosmic haze-gestures and thug-metal raunch, the sound is a beautiful distorted mess. With guest vocals by **Fabienne Shine** (esp. notable on the *Velvets* cover) and a pimp-solid bottom, this is one of the best drug warps to spew past us in a while. A real surprise LP has sailed over from France by a trio called *Outtakes* (*Abstract/Concrete Recordings*). Their weird yet down-the-middle improvisational gestures evince evocative compositional goodness. A sincere avant-instrumental vibe of pop/noise psychadelix runs through the grooves and we certainly hope there's more brewing. Word has it that they are preparing a musical tribute to the Beats. Something else to find if you can is the *Djinn Funnel* LP by the **Sub City Girls** (*Nashazphone*). Label is either French or Algerian or some damn thing, and the music (recorded live between '99 and '01) is a largely instrumental affair, displaying the band at their surreal psych utmost.

If, like us, you're an unabashed fanatic for bowed metal and dry ice combos then dude we got the record for you. It's *5015 AD* (*Ehse*), the new 12" by Baltimore's finest drone-cum-tongue-tie outfit, **Trockeneis**.



trockeneis

With silkscreened jackets by **Twig Harper** and **Carly Ptak**, this is the sound of what **Ian Nagoski** claims is the best city for experimental music, bar none: Baltimore. So, yeah, no doubt, no argument. Trockeneis delivers classic yet singular salutations of fine flutter and squall. Further proof of Baltimore badassness can be found no further than an amazing LP by **Harrius** (*Ehse*). Harrius is a duo of **Metalux' Jenny Graf** and the we-need-to-hear-more-from **Chiara Giovando**. Anyone who spun the cassette wheels off that **Carly Ptak/Chiara Giovando** *Herese* tape from a couple years back should start the party NOW, as Chiara astounds here with a fine balance of slow, unfolding sound-dadaistix and palpable energy-microphone-allure. Jenny Graf is an excellent partner in this work which has marks of Metalux motion-magic strangeness but with a sparser spatial vibe. Dig it. Besides Ehse and Herese another heavy Baltimore label is Hoss and they've



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just released one of the heaviest discs of 06: the debut LP (CD is on the Hit Dat label) by **WZT Hearts**, *Heat Chief*. If you love quilted blankets as much as we do you will absolutely trip out sinking into the cover art which is a collaged bevy of fine bizarre weaves. And even if you don't, you'll still get sucked into the head-split of WZT (pronounce "wet") Hearts' deep sound forage. A killer side.

Put This Way (Feudal Gesture) is the first volume of verse by long-time rock writer, **Michael Layne Heath**. Mike has been around since the earliest days of the DC scene, but is now based in SF. The poems sound like they're being shouted through a bottle, and Mike has a nice romantic take on the deprivations of a life lived without excuses. Good stuff. On a related shelf we find *dear friends, lovers suckers* by Wesley Eisold and Charles Rowland (Heartworm Press). Both members of **Some Girls**, the book combines some the better (more reflective and funny) tour diary entries we've seen in a while with some excellently mean-spirited poetry by Eisold. Commendable work from a couple of guys who sound like they're real pricks when they're fucked up. More sober (in a way) is **Carol Lewis**'s *Magenta's Adventures Underground* with drawings by **Regine Polenz** (Words Like Kudzu Press). Originally serialized in *New York Nights*, this short novel is a lovely, surreal version of Alice, set in the subways of Manhattan with sex, veterans and ghosts of war tossed into the mix. Regine's art reminds me a bit of **Emily Hubley**'s early work. Which means it's good, too.

Got some heavy treats from Hook or Crook, a new bizarro-garage label from Oakland. The *Panther Howl* LP by **Haunted George** is a strange one-man grovel in graveyard dirt by **Steve Pallow** (ex-**Necessary Evils**). It totally delivers on the failed promise of an album I once had by a guy calling himself "The Singing Mortician." It's kinda like the **Zacherle/Bryan Gregory** duo album you always dreamed of. Next is **Demon's Claws**' *Live in Spring Branch Texas* LP. This Montreal outfit has the same sorta drug-swamp aura as *Au Go Go*-era **Scientists**, and their seven songs are screamed into a deep well of drunken goodness.

Another one of the choicer garage records of late is eponymous debut LP by **The Golden Boys** (Perpetrator). It's not clear why this Texas band had to go to New Zealand to find a label for the LP (I think the CD might be on Hook or Crook), but what the heck? They have a very cracked and shaky take on raunch-hootenanny-ism recalling members of the *In The Red* stable, as well as some of Memphis' more lop-sided degenerates. There are parts of this disk that cohere into something identifiably musical, but not enough to bother us. Anyone who remembers the New Zealand bands **Constant Pain** and **3Ds** can find solace in knowing that some of these creeps are now bombing around Scotland and the UK, coming together when touched by the black thumb of Beelzebub in order to blow out overly skuzzed metal puke rock under the aegis of **Evil**. Evil's first document is a 10", *A True Untimely Atrocity* (Wishbone Records) and it's pretty damn hellacious. Good to hear Liz Matthews smashing her kit and awesome to once again see artwork by 3Ds' David Mitchell. These tots may have sold their buns to the devil but if that's what it takes, then screw God. Hell is our destiny. Sweden has some of the most bonker-zone record labels on the planet, such as **Cold Meat Industry** and **Freak Animal**. Those are

both industrial noise-mung arbiters, but the label that's got us trying to rip the ears off our heads in fits of dementia is **UFO Mongo**, a sub-label of **Borft Records**, seemingly bent on exposing us to the distorted vocals and blumpie-gushing synth puke of label zeros **Enema Syringe**. ES's *Visa Mig Vägen Till Mellringe* LP and *Screaming Fish 7"* really had us in a herniated hucklebuck, so we were cautious in our approach to the *Angst Vor Alles* LP by **Commando Laarz**, one of the ES loonies and a pal. Not so different than the ES sound which is okay: we weren't actually looking forward to variations on this specific fuckery. But Sweden man, whatever happened to the tender vision of **Tesco Vee**'s love-pump fantasy, Agnetha Fältskog?

One dude from Sweden we dig in ways that border on scary is saxophone gnasher **Mats Gustafsson**. Mats has got rock and roll and deep avant jazz outré-ness raging through his Scando blood. Proof positive is the torch of inspiration passed on to his teenage daughter **Alva Melin**. Along with girl teen partner **Gabbi Evren**, these two have created the stunning **Drap En Hund** (English translation: Slay a Dog) which is primarily bass guitar, drums and vocals. Taking cues from the wonderfulness of ESG (as well as the entire history of DIY spuzz) DEH have fearlessly cut the killer CD, *Be Yourself* (Slottet SLMI), with such tunes as "God Damned Destroyed," "Don't Drink" and "Hate You." Why be something that you're not? A lovely thing.

Finally laid hands on **Ports Bishop**'s first photography collection, *Future Friends* (Little Cakes), and it's a brilliant evocation of past, present and post-present all balled into one. The photos were taken at two recent rural music festivals and the images are brilliantly evocative of the sense of time-collapsing so



demon's claws

inherent to today's underground. Some of the pics could be diddley-ass out-takes from an old hippie tome, others are so obviously current you can almost hear the SQUEE of noise-amps in the background. Viewed together, the result is a swank portrait of group of people self-consciously losing themselves in the ether at T-3 speed. It's very strong work. *Treasure Chest* (Galleria Paolo Bonzano) is the second LP by New York's **Hurray**, an ensemble devoted to various terminal branches of sonic architecture. We've seen this new one referred to as "noisy folk music," but that doesn't really tell the tale. What it actually sounds like is a few guys up in a treehouse, throwing sticks and stones at some guys with guitars who are trying to climb up "their special ladder." The new **Timo van Luyk** and **Kris Vanderstraeten** LP, *High Noon* (La Scie Dorée), is another journey through the Buddhist mind of free percussion via van Luyk's long running collaborator Vanderstraeten.



Like the *Af Ursin* sides van Luyk recorded (and just about anything on his label La Scie Doree) it's all high grade spirit-spun with enough klang to ring any tuff kid's gong.

Received the first two issues of **Sarah Bevan's** comic, *ShutEye* (Short Pants Press). Each issue has one story unrelated to the other by anything except mood. The first issue is called "Vea," and has a vaguely Poe-like vibe, telling a story about a deserter drifting into different realities amidst an ever-changing word of grass. The second, "Liar," is about loss of identity and Scotch hallucinations. Both are simple, but very-well told, and the art (as well as the silkscreened covers) is quite bonus.

An amazing split LP is to be had from **Jerusalem and the Starbaskets** and **Skarekraouradio** (Apop). J.A.T.S.B.'s side is some kind of unholy union betwixt an early lost Pavement session and maybe if the Velvets did jam with the Modern Lovers. It's almost that cool, but it stands alone. A boss meander that works wonders. Skarkouradio is a messed up amalgamation of free zap noise guitar and girls on LSD with nowhere to go except into the dungeon of your burning brain. Sweet stuff. Missouri and Illinois is where these nutrockers come from so dig it: this is some new killer American mung. Fugkin recommended. As is the split shared by two Cali bands, **Child Pornography** and **Quem Queritis** (Not Not Fun), both of whom mix sideways-moving improv spass-aktion with distinctive house-party formalism. What you get is a mix of disturbed urk and subliminal booty-rassling. Which might well split your butt right down the middle!

The Olde English Spelling Bee has gone beyond the call of duty by reissuing **Copper/Silver**, the momentous collaborative meeting between Portland, OR's **Yellow Swans** and Australia's molten-drone-core kings, **Grey Daturas**. Initially released as a tiny edition CDR on Yellow Swans' JYRK label what we have here is a real boss sea-swell of heavy wave deep-mind sound tonic. A double LP, again limited, and a possessed session spotlighting what is truly great within the world of contemporary underground music. No site for Olde English Spelling Bee but most small distributors seem to carry it. Yellow Swans, excellent in their own right, are heard in another collaborative state, this time with **Charalambides' Tom Carter** as a unit entitled *Mudsuckers*. Their self-titled debut CD on Important has more open free-sparkle action than the collab with Grey Daturas, but still maintains the underlying sonic river of charmed-tone tongue that makes their shit a wicked listen. Mudsuckers is a collective with other musicians involved, particularly **Henry Kuntz**, a man with a long history of avant-garde saxophone work. Cool to see him here for sure. Important Records is also to be commended for issuing a balls-out mutha of a session by **Paul Flaherty, Chris Corsano** and C. Spencer Yeh. *A Rock In The Snow* has all the high action trademarks of a swingin' Flaherty/Corsano affair. Blasting concept percussion techniques and white beard reed/bell energy lines all in a package made more remarkable and entertaining with the inclusion of kick-ass liner notes by **Wolf Eyes**' John "Coorz" Olson.

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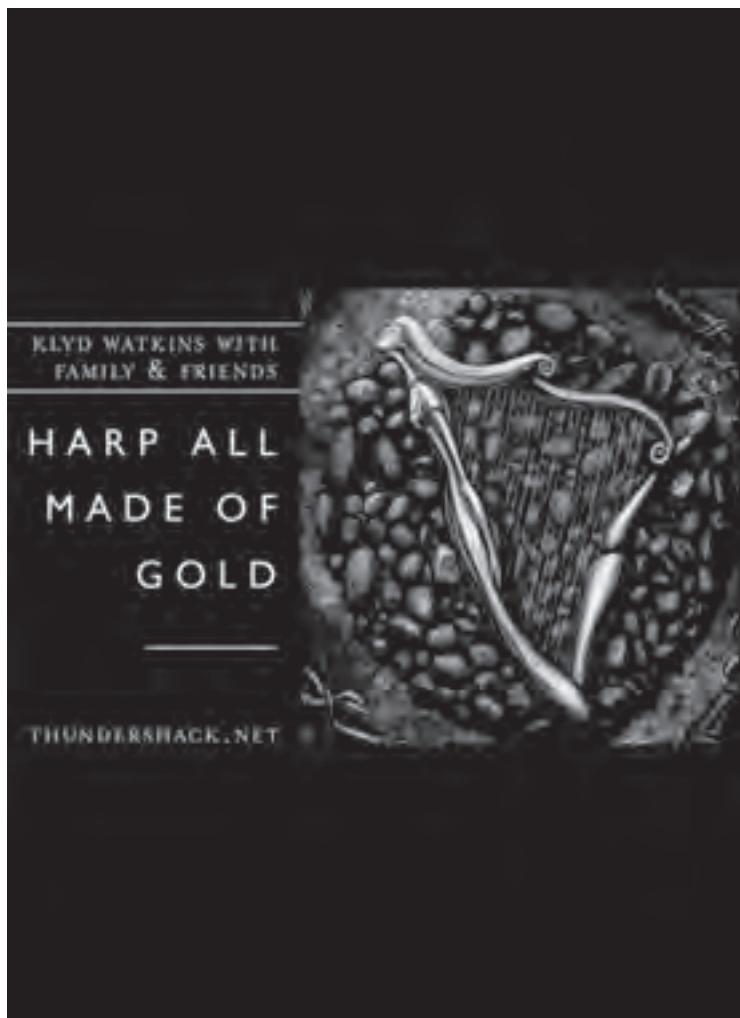
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REVIEWS.



Sandy Bull: Put on your boots and stay awhile.

BLURRED + SPACEY

Sandy Bull
Still Valentine's Day 1969 (Water)

By Nabob Shinyewater

When I was living in Point Reyes, my closest friends became people in their sixties. They would share stories with me as I managed the community print shop. One day I was listening to Sandy Bull, and a visiting Vietnam vet shared a great story with me. One day back in the late '60s he was riding his bicycle through Mill Valley when he heard very, very loud music. He was able to locate the house it was coming from, and sat on the porch and listened for about three hours. Then the music stopped and he knocked on the door to thank the artist. Two very tall African women opened the door, traditionally dressed and very gorgeous. Then Sandy appeared, and was friendly, but also severely spacey. The house was empty with white walls and carpet. My friend was already familiar with Sandy's music, and had attended some of the shows in San Francisco that Sandy was doing. He rode away on his bicycle, surprised and happy.

Sandy lived in Berkeley, Mill Valley and Fairfax in the '60s and his best friend was Hamza El Din, the oudist from Egypt. What a special time these men had together. Hamza had arrived in the United States after opening for the Grateful Dead at the Pyramids. He is best known for his '70s release *Escalay* (translated as The Water Wheel), which features Sandy playing an ancient beat on an ancient drum. In *Escalay*, Hamza wanted to translate the feelings of the folks whose role it was to haul water to and from the well. It's the best cinematic folk music I've heard—when you listen to it alone you actually arrive at his homeland. The oud is the most gut-pounding stringed instrument I've heard: it sends out depthful waves, resonations that have

bass where you wouldn't expect it.

Still Valentine's Day is a live album from 1969, and the result of Sandy pushing the limits by using an electric oud through about four different Fender amps, all with heavy reverb and vibrato. I really enjoy the entire collection of songs, and have spent some high times with them lately. The songs feel a little more blurry and druggy than on *E Pluribus Unum*, the 1968 studio album where a lot of them first appeared. Which I appreciate: I am getting stoned a lot, so I am currently looking for items to reflect that, that I respect. Yet I know he was into the junkier side of drug experiments. I feel if the tapes were mixed track-by track, that it could expose some more low-end that might be now missing. Sandy had a degree in classical bass; he was highly skilled, and his bass lines are sometimes just as interesting as his oud.

Sandy's shows are another discussion, but briefly, he wouldn't play with anyone. So he recorded all the instrumentation on analog tape, and then figured a way to sync up each tape machine. He would then haul this to a gig, press play on everything, then rotate between electric oud and pedal steel. Sandy bootlegs are amazing and even funny, as he was so interesting—Sandy had a great style and it is rumored that William Burroughs saw Sandy and immediately copied his fashion; the Beatles song "Come Together" is actually about Sandy; etc. Anyway, Sandy told obscure funny stories between songs. This release has a small dialogue about the live sound engineer; the unmastered version I have actually has a huge wallop of stage feedback due to the lack of understanding by the evening's sound engineer of just what Sandy was attempting in relation to amplified reverb. The feedback is a painful-sounding slash across the speakers, not interesting at all, and isn't approved of by Sandy. The same thing regularly happens today in live performance—this realm has not progressed much, and the truth of it is that it's the fault of people's stagnant exchange with audio psychedelia. There's been a lack of progression or maybe a lack of respect for the trade of sound engineering folk.

If you get to know the songs you can actually feel Sandy become elated with tonality as he plays here. Some may think his jams are light, or even beatnik. I think his jams are of the heaviest order, and I believe him to be Northern California's greatest artist ever because he wasn't a contrived enterprise. This music is a reflection of what was the norm in NorCal back then. People were learning about the strength of folk culture around the world, and using that knowledge to justify dropping out ... and to drop out in colorful, musical ways. ☺

Sunn O))) & Boris: Robespersons of the pre-apocalypse.



BLACK HOLE WHITE MAGIC

Sunn O))) & Boris

Altar (Southern Lord)

White Magic

Dat Rosa Mel Apibus (Drag City)

By Chris Ziegler

I had *Altar* complete in my head before I ever heard it: Sunn O))) and Boris together to make the heaviest thing ever, an album that would burst cochlear membranes and the confines of three-dimensional spacetime. Modern music's two most immovable objects: what would happen when they met? Maybe nothing—in fact, hopefully nothing, and *Altar* would be pure void, a subatomic drone that would go beyond Sunn O))) and Earth and Flood to the low slow B-flat hum NASA heard coming from a black hole around the same time Sunn O)))'s *White 1* came out. "A million billion times lower than the lowest sound audible to the human ear!" NASA said, complete with exclamation point. That was the true sound of the universe, and if any humans could play along, well, here they were: two bands with discographies so colossal that you couldn't deploy anything less than three syllables per adjective without feeling cheap and weak. (Cyclopean? Titanic? Hephaestean?) NASA called this new science "black hole acoustics" and that was the best explanation yet—better than the New York Times' cutesy 'heady metal' anywaay.

But *Altar* is the un-heaviest. Six or seven minutes into opener "Etna" (played in the spirit of the volcano that will devour Sicily) presents the riff-vs.-drone grappling match the collaboration demanded, and it is satisfactorily hephestean. Last year's *Black One* and *Pink* anticipate these moments—*Pink*'s intro "Parting" especially, though Boris drummer Atsuo rarely pushes a straight 4/4 rock beat, instead mating drums to drone with a rush/recede dynamic that must have cheered the Coltrane students in Sunn O))). Black hole acoustics is science for space and gravity and not amplifier athleticism, though, so credit to Boris and Sunn O))) for *Altar*'s sidewise moves. Sunn O))) provokes orgasm and Boris melts minds—we know that and so do they, so let's improv something else.

"Sinking Belle (Blue Sheep)" is probably the songiest thing to ever bear a Sunn O))) stamp; Internet drones are straight-facedly calling it "folk pop" and while that's a bit broad, it's ... understandable. Earth's *Hex* had passages of twilight-zone quiet and "Sinking Belle" collects them together: reverbed piano that blooms and dissolves like ink



White Magic: Meanwhile,
outside the city gates...

into water with
Jesse Sykes (singer from Seattle's
Sweet Hereafter) sounding like Nico at her frowniest,
or actually sounding a lot like Sybille Baier, another dissipated '60s
teuton-chanteuse. After that is "Akuma No Kuma," an all-synth-no-guitar track
(with Joe Preston growling through a vocoder) that fits the fire-and-fog *Blade
Runner* opening, and after that the desolate "Fried Eagle Mind," a wave of tube
tone washing over Boris guitarist Wata's ghost vocals. "Blood Swamp" has to
float back home: rumble finally turns to roar as Soundgarden's Kim Thayil gets
a guitar to sound like something that breathes mud—or blood?—to stay alive. A
hephaestean finale, sure, but not the truncated concussion both bands favor.
There is clear-to-cloudy precedent for everything on Altar in the million billion
minutes of discography belonging to Boris and Sunn O))), but it's softness
as much as the UNNNworgworgUNNN we've known and absorbed. Three
songs into *Altar*, the album starts to float. Heavy is light.

I would hate to just bluntly ask White Magic if they actually believe in magic—
too obvious, too impolite. But even a lump like me can tell that Mira Billotte's
songs about trees and wine and sun and sea refer to more than just a holiday
fit for Fairport Convention. White Magic sings one thing and secretly means
another, or several secret other things aligned in symbolic harmony. The band
put a labyrinth on the back cover where they could have put a map. So I can't
say I wasn't warned.

Billotte and a new set of supporters—including partner Douglas Shaw,
Jim White from Dirty Three, Tim DeWit from Gang Gang Dance and noted
New York percussionist Tim Barnes—built White Magic's first full-length *Dat
Rosa Mel Apibus* around her famously agile voice and the cascading piano
melodies she plays to match Bert Jansch's precision fingerpicking. Rosa is
gentle on solemn guitar-and-voice songs like "Katie Cruel" (also covered by
probable White Magic inspiration Karen Dalton) and "What I See," but spins
into psychedelic experiment like the sitar raga on "All The World Went" and
the dub/reggae arrangement (and production!) for finale "Song of Solomon,"
which is almost an Althea and Donna song until the accordion starts pumping
toward climax. That's a dizzy finish to a record that begins with a single piano
note, and a happy release for the ideas half-hatched on 2004's *Through The
Sun Door* EP.

Billotte's voice is (as always) a bird in flight, and she writes lyrics in careful
camouflage, packing love songs and lonely songs with loaded notions of
sleep and night and sun and light. It's potent imagery that just begs projection
from the listener. One verse of "Hold Your Hand In The Dark" and I was
convinced we'd read the same Philip K. Dick essay: he said, "Sleepers awake!"
and she sings, "You've been sleeping well, my friends/sleeping well/but if you
wake, it may be too late." Her tense mention of hands in chains and waiting
in secret are from a particular idea Dick had about ... well, too much of this
might put this review to sleep. Different listeners discover different things.
Maybe that means Billotte is just writing easy absolutes—like everyone else,
she loves love and dislikes... chains? But of course not. That seven-petaled
rose on the cover is too close a copy of a Rosicrucian engraving; the trans-
lated title "the rose gives the bees honey" was a line used by alchemists to
distinguish the search for spiritual truth from the search for worldly gain, and
on Rosa's second song Billotte sings, "Gone was our need for the things of
this world/all we had was love." Rosa feels full of these century-to-century
connections. Hidden in this post-Pentangle piano-psych record is something
ferociously righteous. White Magic believes in good research. **@@**

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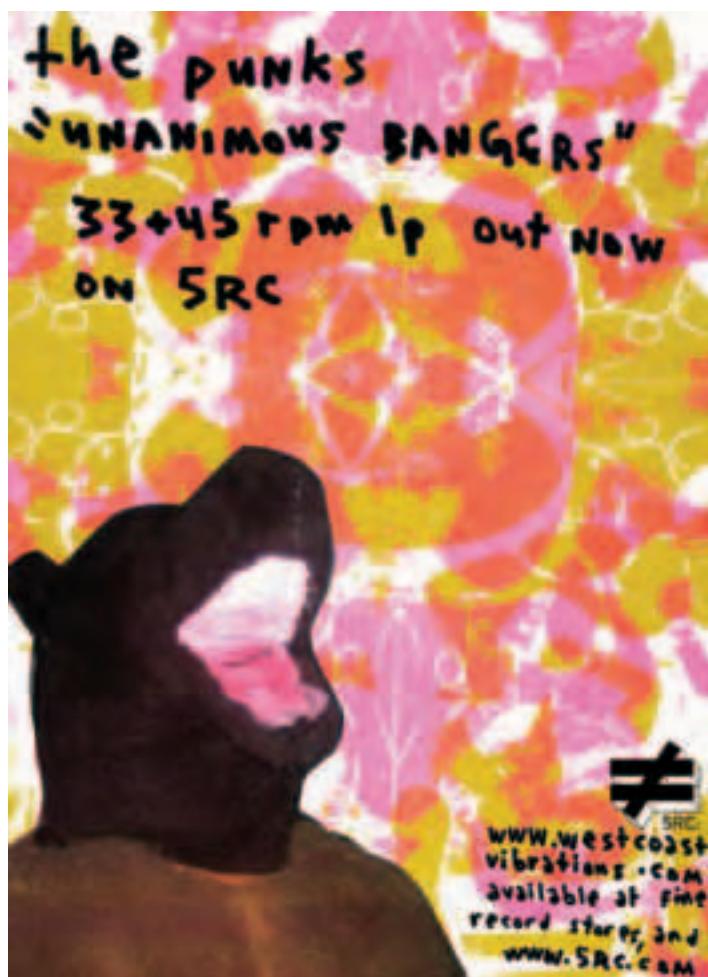
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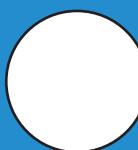
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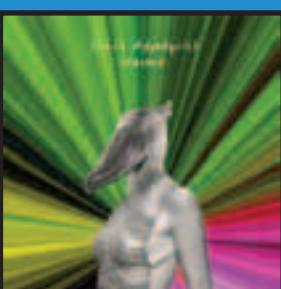
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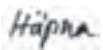
MERRELL FANKHAUSER MAUI CD

Talk about a legend. The un-credited author of "Wipe Out," **Merrell Fankhauser** recorded his mystical folk-rock in 1975, and it has become a masterpiece of touched (and touching) West Coast soul music, a true artifact of the hippie dream of peace, love and harmony for the world. His fragile quest is now remastered and repressed via the weird music archive of **Subliminal Sounds** (also home to **Dungen**).



HANS APPELQVIST NAIMA CD

Swedish experimentalists **Häpona** offer a creative outlet for just about every citizen and Hans Appelqvist is the latest to join the throng. Appelqvist won Swedish radio's "Pop Record of the Year" award in 2004, but *Naima* is the strange, 21-track account of the mysterious Naima, a ghost-like entity whose presence is indicated by the "Naimamelodin" (Naima's Melody). Truly psychedelic pop.



SVEN LIBAEK INNER SPACE: THE LOST FILM MUSIC OF SVEN LIBAEK CD/LP

This release presents the remarkably-recovered archival tapes of Hanna-Barbara composer and Norwegian expatriot **Sven Libaek**, who went on to score over 200 films in Australia. Libaek recently came back into vogue via **Wes Anderson's** **Bill Murray** vehicle *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. "An essential purchase for collectors of cult soundtracks and space age bachelor pad albums... one of the unsung geniuses of old school soundtrack composition." (9/10) —**Foxy Digitalis**



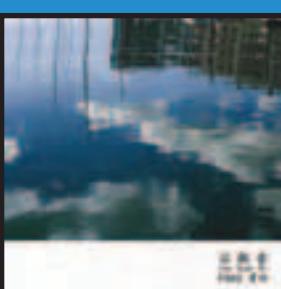
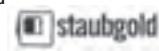
OREN AMBARCHI SUSPENSION CD

Reissued version of **Ambarchi's** 2001 album *Suspension*. Recently garnering critical acclaim opening on the **SunnO)))** tour, a new audience of listeners is discovering the genius of this Australian's sonic manipulations. True to its title, the listener is suspended, either in dense tonal fields or complete silence. A master of guitar and percussion, Ambarchi's brilliance is revealed on repeated listens. Total classic.



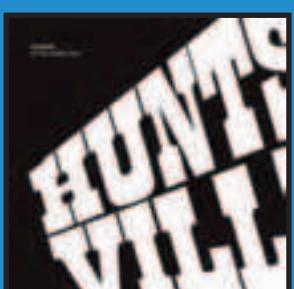
VARIOUS ARTISTS JUKEBOX BUDDHA CD

FM3's now famous Buddha Machine has captured the imagination of the music world, from a colorful editorial by **Alan Bishop** (*Sun City Girls*) in *Arthur Magazine* to a glowing review from indie kingmaker **Pitchfork Media**. Now, the *Jukebox Buddha* collects tracks from SCG, **SunnO)))**, Thomas Fehlmann, Blixa Bargeld, Adrian Sherwood, Jan Jelinek, Alog and more, each chiming in with their take on the soundbox and its sonic bliss.



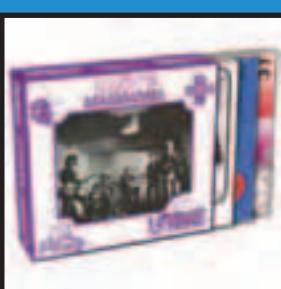
FM3 + DOU WEI HOU GUAN YIN CD

From the dynamic duo that brought you the Buddha Machine comes a new document of Chinese experimental sound. In partnership with Chinese rock star **Dou Wei** and known experimental icon **Yan Jun**, *Hou Guan Yin* is a tour de force of Eastern "poetic noise." All of **FM3's** sounds, including the Buddha Machine, reveal elements of the ancient Chinese folk tradition. Brought to you via Hong Kong's **Lona Records**.



HUNTSVILLE FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS CD

The debut of a new jazz-defying act on Norway's **Rune Grammofon**. The three guys in **Huntsville** have obsessions with **country** music, **electronic** music, **Morton Feldman**, **John Cage**, **drone** music and **folk** music. The result, as you might expect, is sort of mind-blowing. Whether riffing polyrhythmic or jamming with bows, sticks and rubber bands, Hunstville turn traditional genres into radical new concepts.



BLOPS BLOPS 3CD

One of Chile's monumental legends, **Blops** get the definitive treatment with a 3CD heavy book-box from **Shadow's** of their complete works. From the folk-leaning *Los Blops* (1970) to 1971's touching second disc to the prog/psych of 1973's *Locomotor* this limited release exposes a forgotten story of music history. "All three records simply brim with gorgeous and original songs. Easily one of the best reissues of the year." —Michael Klausmann, *Other Music*



BOOM PAM BOOM PAM CD

More hard-to-categorize international songs from **Essay Recordings**. The 4 men of **Boom Pam** make a kind of Israeli surf music that has Europe pumping their fists to Tuba pomp. Through inspirations like **Leadbelly**, **Link Wray** and **Dick Dale**; **Greek** and **Balkan** styles; and adding **Jewish** melodies, "the dance floor goes nuts galloping along to the beat and jumping up and down like pogo sticks."



—**The Fader**



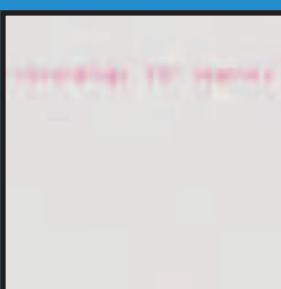
SVARTE GREINER KNIFE CD

Nine tracks of menacing abstraction and surreal, nauseating horror. **Erik K. Skodvin** (one half of **Deaf Center**) comes with blood-curdling ashen sounds from deepest rural Norway. Sounds of saws, wordless chants, crows and cellos accompany you through Skodvin's dusty anthology of surreal, pagan paeans. Early reports from the Norwegian countryside are calling this "acoustic doom."



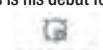
GEIR JENSSSEN CHO OYU 8201m CD

Another brilliant collaboration between esteemed arthouse **Touch/Ash** and Mr. Jenssen, aka **Biosphere**. Subtitled: *Field Recordings from Tibet*, these are expert sound recordings from the top of the world. As he climbs Cho Oyu, Jenssen found 12 locales to capture yak bells, mountain birds, ferocious hail and finally, track 12, "Summit." *Cho Oyu* contains some source material from Biosphere's 2006 masterwork *Dropsonde*. *Cho Oyu* is a journey unto itself.



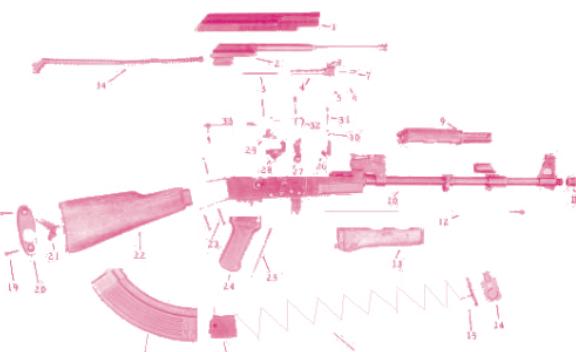
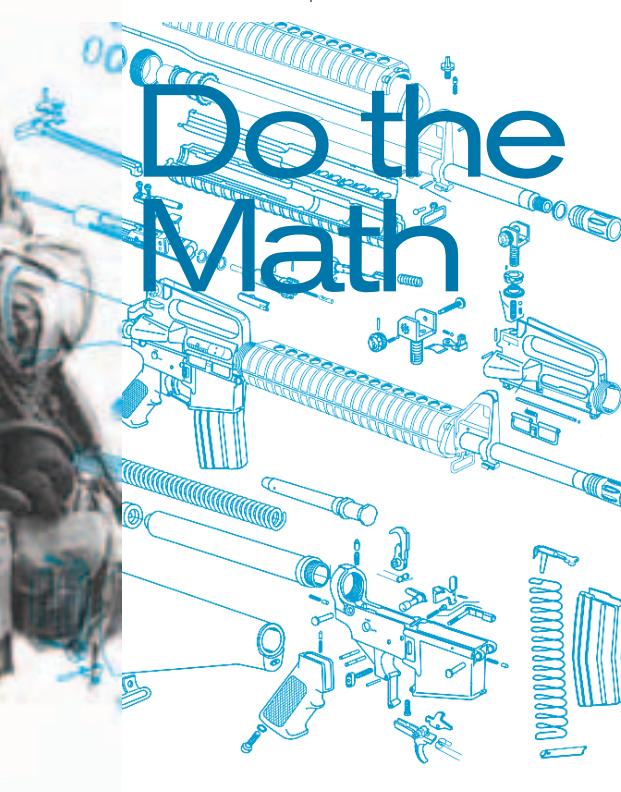
HECKER RECORDINGS FOR REPHLEX CD

Austria's **Florian Hecker** is one of the most well-respected computer musicians in the world. His *Sun Pandamonium* received a 2003 Prix Ars Electronica award of distinction and its subsequent release won him fans worldwide. He has played the **MUTEK** festival, Boston's **non-event** programme, the **Frieze Art Fair** (opening for **SunnO)))** alongside **Russell Haswell** and **Sonar**. This is his debut for **Aphex Twin's** **Rephlex** label.



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DAVE
REEVES



Fairweather Americans, I want to point out that regardless of other shortcomings, the Middle East strategies of the Bush administration have made it possible for several young citizens to acquire real estate. Sure, the plots are only three feet long and six feet wide, but it's a quiet neighborhood. The soldiers can't complain.

That's right, for 3,000 American soldiers every day is Earth Day, and will be until the worms finish them off. American dead are the only ones that count as the road to peace is traditionally paved in hearts, minds and other charred viscera of the country you're freezing.

The freedom America is pushing on Iraq isn't the standard "Statue of Liberty" brand of freedom. No, if you read the bold type this is actually "Enduring" Freedom, which is more like a "just another word for nothing left to lose" type of freedom. Enduring freedom means freedom from having to go to school. Freedom from sewage and electric power.

For many, the Iraqi occupation is a no brainer. Iraqi's with brain in skull are plenty pissed. It's like this: guys like Wariz My-Roof in Fallujah or Burli the Kurd up in the mountains stay on the Sunni side of the street and don't take no Shi'ite. The Shi'ites feel the same about the Sunnis and Kurds, only more so. We're not sure what the beef is about. Even when we figure out which side we're on, these damn Semites all look the same to an Apache helicopter.

The beef that started Cold and hot wars between the Soviet Union and the United States was this: "How can communism hope to compete with the infinite genius of greed?" This question forced the two great powers to produce an infantry weapon which manifested their philosophy to best achieve peace on earth. War is just debate carried on by other means.

The designer of the Soviet rifle is a man named Mikhail Kalashnikov, wounded by Nazis in WWII because Stalin was such an arrogant prick he gave his troops crappy guns that jammed when the Germans came at them with fully operational automatics that didn't.

Kalashnikov laid up in a hospital bed and designed a weapon that you can bet doesn't jam. To this day, sixty years later, the AK-47 is the blaster of choice for home boys in the home guards because

Kalashnikov keeps it simple, stupid. The AK's seven moving parts are easy to clean, which means a lot to troops hardly old enough to clean their rooms. Kalashnikov designed the rifle to be short because the poor and huddled masses tend to be malnourished and small.

The AK design is so simple that it is routinely hammered out in Pakistani workshops. Most importantly, the AK will throw a clip full of bullets the size of your thumb through a city wall every time you pull the trigger.

On the other hand the M-16 rifle and its ammunition were designed to be light enough to promote mobility. The 16 is a luxury weapon pressed out of plastic and airlifted into exotic firefights on fancy helicopters. The American business gun has a little handle on top like the brief case for the profitable Kissinger wars. It shoots bullets developed to wound and not kill, as cost analysis dictates that a wounded soldier costs the enemy more than a dead one.

Unfortunately, these diabolical Arabs daubed their cities from an ingenious mixture of mud, water and lime, and molded it into a magical rock called "cement" that our wounding bullets can't penetrate. American troops confidence tens to erodes when the AK shoots back at them through stucco like it was butter.

The M-16 has about thirty three moving parts, the sum of which require more lubrication than a Senate page. Pakis don't counterfeit M-16 in their workshops for the same reason that nobody polishes pieces of shit. Over the past couple of wars American service people have come up with cute nicknames for the America's combat rifle like the "Jam O Matic" and "Poodle Shooter." It is worth noting Private Jessica Lynch's squad was overrun because nearly every M-16 in her squad failed.

The best part about foreign countries buying American M-16's is that, due to a market force called "planned obsolescence," our rifles are as reliable as our cars. So we gift these traps to countries like Columbia, and a week later when they break down the Columbians have to use all their well learned politics to get parts for their Jam O Matic Poodle Shooters.

The sad truth of humanity is that weapons systems are the fullest manifestation of the

philosophy governing the country of manufacture. Planned obsolescence will be the Achilles heel of gunboat capitalism. As Noam says, "The US is a huckster-driven, business-run society, and deceit is its greatest value." It's called karma when a huckster is forced to use his own snake oil as medicine.

Chavez bought a hundred thousand AK's to underline those Chomsky quotes he was yelling at the UN about "American Hegemony". Rebels have to use the AK because they must take the revolution through jungles, into the high mountains and across deserts. Venezuela's old rifle, the M-16, has problems with these harsh environs and most of the successful M-16 battles have occurred in the homerooms of American high schools.

The Persian Gulf is ringed in assolts with functioning AK's and a couple hundred Russian-made ship-killing Sunburn missiles. One salvo of our carrier fleet and America's Ace in the hole is nothing but a hole. Corporate wars suck. Where is the profit in losing your ass?

A war against Iran will prove to be the best recruiting tool for Islamic extremism since the war against Iraq. House negroes like Woodward and Powell stopped drinking the White House Kool-Aid over this, but rats always leave the ship just before it sinks.

Luckily, President Bush's extensive background as a Yale cheerleader will come in handy when the chips are down. Did you know that Russian president Putin has a sixth degree black belt in Judo? It's possible that we flew the "Mission Accomplished" banner over the Cold War too soon, too. We should put that banner away for a while.

When all else fails Arab savages won't be shocked or awed by any thing less lethal than pop music, cable television, booze and internet porn. When the real weapons of freedom are unsheathed the fertile crescent will be deader than an American Indian reservation.

If pacification fails, Bush's master's plan is to allow chaos reign until Arabs nuke Israel and vice versa. "The land without people for a people without a land" is glassed over into nothing for neither. Chaos is the mother of fascism. Ineptitude is a strategy. If things go wrong enough, Republicans won't even have to steal the election because there won't be one. (a)



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"After five minutes it would scare the living shit out of any black-metal fan and cause neo-cons to run naked through the streets while they ate their young..."

Chris Funk of **The Decemberists**,
in *Under The Radar*